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# The Heroic Age of India



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# The Heroic Age of India

A Comparative Study

By  
N. K. SIDHANTA

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## PREFACE

**D**ISRAELI somewhere asserts that experience is less than nothing to a creative mind, and that almost everything that is great has been done by youth. The theory may not hold good for latter-day society ; but it is eminently applicable to a particular stage in the history of almost every nation. In such a state of society the energy and exuberance of youth find expression in vigorous action, in deeds of might and valour. The individual asserts himself against old bonds and old ties, which are replaced by new.

Yet for what we call a " Heroic Age " something more is necessary. The heroism must be there ; but the hero must have someone to commemorate his acts. This record of his deeds is not a product of the imagination or the brain of a later time ; it originates there and then with the performance of the heroic action. We have extant such poetic records in the literature of various countries, poems which though " widely separated from one another both in date and place of origin " present strikingly similar features. The *Iliad* and *Beowulf*, the stories of Sigurthr and Roland are records of this type ; and the period to which they relate may, in each case, be called a " Heroic Age ".

The Indian student of these poems is naturally led to inquire how far the " heroic " poems of his own country show resemblances to the Western products. In the following pages an attempt has been made to study the Sanskrit heroic poems as a parallel to similar poems of European lands. This involves an examination of the origin and development of these poems, including an investigation of the society to which they relate. In this investigation I have mainly relied on the originals, though some critical works have been of

great help. All such obligations have been indicated in their proper place, but there is a much deeper debt which must be acknowledged here. I cannot adequately describe how much I owe to Professor H. M. Chadwick, Bosworth and Elrington Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Cambridge, but for whose help and encouragement the book would never have been written at all. Only those who have had the privilege of working with him will appreciate how deep is my debt.

N. K. S.

# THE HEROIC AGE OF INDIA

## CHAPTER I

### THE EARLY NARRATIVE POETRY OF INDIA

THE narrative poetry of India, dating from about the beginning of the Christian era, is mainly to be found in two works, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. The main story of the former is included in the latter as an episode ; so that, in an attempt to summarize the earliest stories of the deeds of Indian kings and princes, we may confine ourselves to the latter work.

The *Mahābhārata* is mainly concerned with the deeds of the Kurus and the Pāṇḍavas, who are described as cousins. Vicitravīrya, the king of Hastināpura, having died early, his step-brother begot issue with his wives on the principle of the levirate. Two sons were born ; and the elder, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, being blind from birth, the younger son, Pāṇḍu, succeeded to the throne. After some time, however, the latter grew weary of royal duties and retired to the forest with his two wives, Kuntī and Mādri. It was probably in the forest that his five sons, Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva, were born ; and after Pāṇḍu's death, they were taken to Hastināpura by some hermits of the forest. Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who had been in charge of the kingdom, in Pāṇḍu's absence, at first accepted Yudhiṣṭhira as the heir to the throne ; but his eldest son, Duryodhana, gradually won him over and began to plan the destruction of the Pāṇḍavas, Yudhiṣṭhira and his brothers. They were persuaded to go to Vārāṇavata, a place near by, and dwell in a house made of lac ; but they came to know of Duryodhana's plans of burning the house over their heads, and escaped in time. After adventures with various monsters of the forest, in which Bhīma is very prominent, they came to Ekacakra where they remained disguised as Brāhmins. There they heard the news

## 2 THE HEROIC AGE OF INDIA

that Draupadī, the daughter of Drupada, the king of Pāñcāla, was going to choose a husband at a *svayamvara*<sup>1</sup> from a gathering of princes. It was not quite a free choice, for the princess was to choose the most successful hero from amongst competitors in archery. Arjuna, disguised as a Brāhmin, succeeded where all the other heroes failed and Drupada accepted him as his son-in-law. The Pāṇḍavas, however, wished to enter into a polyandrous marriage, and Drupada was persuaded to allow all the five brothers to marry her. With the Pāñcāla king as their ally, they made Dhṛtarāṣṭra come to terms with them. They were given half of the kingdom, but were to choose a new capital; they built a wonderful city, Indraprastha. The brothers married other wives, and Arjuna's marriage with Subhadrā, the sister of Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa, is noteworthy as an instance of marriage by capture. After some years of prosperous rule at Indraprastha, the Pāṇḍavas wanted to perform the Rājasūya sacrifice, which would imply their overlordship over the rest of India. Jarāsandha, the powerful king of Magadha, was killed, and other princes were subdued. The sacrifice was performed; but there was a slight hitch as Śiśupāla, one of the assembled princes, would not accept the deification of Kṛṣṇa and was killed by him.

The Pāṇḍavas were now the most powerful princes of India, and this fact excited the envy of their cousins. They persuaded Yudhiṣṭhira to play at dice with their maternal uncle, Śakuni. The latter, who was apparently playing with loaded dice, won all throws against Yudhiṣṭhira, who lost not only his kingdom, but his brothers and himself and his wife, all of whom he had staked. Draupadī was insulted by Duryodhana's brother, and they all had to go into the forest to lead a hermit's life for twelve years. Moreover, they were to spend a thirteenth year in concealment in some king's service. They spent this year in the service of Virāṭa, the king of Matsya, discharging various assumed functions.

About this time Duryodhana and his friends invaded Virāṭa's land on a cattle-raiding expedition and were repelled, mainly through Arjuna's prowess. Then the Pāṇḍavas revealed themselves and Virāṭa offered his daughter Uttarā in marriage to Arjuna. Arjuna declined the offer himself, but accepted it on behalf of his son, Abhimanyu, who was

<sup>1</sup> See p. 94 for explanation of the term.

accordingly married to Uttarā. The friends of the Pāṇḍavas were invited to the marriage-feast; and at the assembly it was decided that a messenger should be sent to Hastināpura asking for the surrender of Yudhiṣṭhira's kingdom, and that the help of other princes should be solicited for the purpose. The exchange of messages between the Kauravas—Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his sons—and the Pāṇḍavas does not lead to any settlement; and the friends of the former assemble at Hastināpura, while those of the latter come to Upaplavya. Kṛṣṇa decides to side with the Pāṇḍavas as a non-combatant, and act as Arjuna's charioteer.

Preparations for the war are hurried on, and Dhṛṣṭadyumna, the son of Drupada, is appointed commander-in-chief of the Pāṇḍava forces, while Bhīṣma, Dhṛtarāṣṭra's uncle, is in charge of the Kauravas. After nine days of hard fighting Bhīṣma is killed by Arjuna with the help of Śikhaṇḍin. Droṇa, the military preceptor of the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas, is the next leader of Duryodhana's army. In the engagements that follow many prominent heroes lose their lives—among others, Ahhimanyu and Ghaṭotkaca on the Pāṇḍava side and Jayadratha on the Kaurava. Then Droṇa himself is killed through a deception practised by Yudhiṣṭhira on the advice of Kṛṣṇa. Karṇa, the Sūta prince of Anṅa, is Droṇa's successor; and Śalya, the prince of the Madras, is his charioteer. There are encounters between Yudhiṣṭhira and Duryodhana, between Dhṛṣṭadyumna and Kṛpa, between Bhīma and Aśvatthāmā, Droṇa's son. But the main event is Karṇa's fight with Arjuna; and Arjuna kills Karṇa when the latter is at a disadvantage through the wheels of his chariot having sunk into the earth.

Śalya is the next leader of the Kauravas; but things go badly with them. Śalya, Śakuni, and finally Duryodhana himself are killed; and of the Kaurava host only three heroes are left. These three call to mind the various acts of treachery of the Pāṇḍavas and decide to fall on them when asleep at night. They succeed in surprising the Pāṇḍava host; and almost all the supporters of the Pāṇḍavas are slain. They have, however, gained the victory and they enter into the possession of the whole kingdom, while Dhṛtarāṣṭra and the older people retire into the forest. Yudhiṣṭhira then performs the great horse-sacrifice and establishes his claim as the

suzerain of the whole of North India. Finally, in the company of his brothers and his wife, he proceeds to heaven.

This is the main story of the *Mahābhārata*; but there are many episodes, introduced in the epic fashion. One of the best known of these<sup>1</sup> is the story of Nala. Nala, the king of the Niṣadhas, had heard of the beauty of Damayanti, the daughter of Bhīma, the king of the Vidarbhas. He had come to conceive a passion for her, and commissioned a swan to carry his message of love to Damayanti. Damayanti had already heard of the accomplishments of Nala, and was now ready to return Nala's love. Her father, in the meanwhile, was making arrangements for her *svayamvara*, and all the famous princes hastened to the assembly. The gods, too, came to learn of the event; and Indra, Agni, Yama, and others proceeded towards Bhīma's capital. On the way they met Nala and persuaded him to act as their messenger to Damayanti; but Damayanti would not accept anyone except Nala, and the deities were satisfied with her choice. However, one of the supernatural beings, Kali, was displeased; he entered into Nala to lead him to misfortune. Nala was induced to play at dice with his brother, Puṣkara, and lost all his possessions. Puṣkara insisted that no one in the city should offer hospitality to the homeless Nala, who had now to wander about in the forest with Damayanti. Nala asked his wife to go to her father's home leaving him there; but devoted to her husband as she was, she would not. When, however, she had fallen asleep, Nala arose and went away, leaving her alone in the forest. After meeting with various adventures, she arrived at the capital of the king of the Cedis, where she was taken to the queen-mother and offered to act as her maidservant. The queen-mother accepted her services, and Damayanti was to be a companion to her daughter, Sunandā. Bhīma, on hearing of the misfortunes of his son-in-law, sent out messengers to inquire as to the whereabouts of Nala and Damayanti; and one of these, Sudeva, saw her in Sunandā's company and recognized her. The queen-mother, on coming to know who she was, revealed that she was Damayanti's mother's sister. She thereupon made arrangements for Damayanti's return to her father's palace.

<sup>1</sup> *Mbh.*, iii, 53 ff.

Back in Bhīma's palace, Damayantī was not happy, but pined for her scapegrace husband. Nala was now serving as the charioteer of king R̥tuparṇa of Ayodhyā, to whom he desired to impart his knowledge of the management of horses in exchange for some instruction in the manipulation of dice. Before arriving at Ayodhyā, Nala had encountered Karoṭaka, king of the Nāgas, who in return for some services rendered by Nala had advised him to go to R̥tuparṇa, and had transformed his appearance, so that Nala could not now be recognized by anyone. Damayantī, longing to rejoin her husband, sent messengers to the courts of various kings; and one of them came back and reported some comments on Damayantī's story made by one Bāhuka, the charioteer of king R̥tuparṇa. Damayantī suspected that this was Nala; and without informing her father, she sent a message to king R̥tuparṇa. The messenger was to tell the king that as it could not be known whether Nala was alive or not, Damayantī was about to hold a second *śrayaṃvara* on the next day. R̥tuparṇa knew it was impossible to cover the long distance in one day, but Bāhuka promised to do it and they started. On the way R̥tuparṇa taught the disguised Nala the art of handling dice skilfully; and at that time Kali, who had tormented him so long, left his body. Arrived at the city of the Vidarbhas, R̥tuparṇa was surprised to find no other prince there; when Bhīma asked him why he had undertaken the journey he had to devise an excuse. In the meanwhile, Damayantī sent one of her servants to converse with Bāhuka and find out who he was. On hearing of what Bāhuka had said, Damayantī's suspicions were strengthened and she interviewed him herself. Nala then revealed himself to her and soon afterwards assumed his old appearance. After residing with Bhīma for a while he went back to his own land and challenged Puṣkara to a second game of dice. With his newly acquired skill Nala vanquished Puṣkara and won back his kingdom and all his possessions.

The story of Rāma is well known, since it was made the theme for the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Daśaratha, king of Ayodhyā, had sons by three wives—Rāma by Kausalyā, Lakṣmaṇa by Sumitrā, and Bharata by Kaikeyī. Daśaratha wanted to instal the eldest, Rāma, as the prince regent. But Kaikeyī reminded Daśaratha of a boon promised her long ago and got



him to banish Rāma and instal Bharata in his place. Rāma proceeded to the forest, accompanied by his wife, Sītā, and by Lakṣmaṇa. Daśaratha died soon after, and Kaikeyī wanted to make her son king; but Bharata would not consent. He went to the forest to bring back Rāma, who refused to disobey his father's orders, saying that he must remain in the forest for the fixed number of years. There he had an encounter with some Rākṣasas (monsters), slew their leaders, Khara and Duṣaṇa, and wounded their sister, Śūrpanakhā. She went back to her brother, Rāvaṇa, the ruler of Laṅka, and incited him to injure Rāma. Rāvaṇa's friend, Mārīca, took the form of a golden deer and tempted Rāma to pursue him, while Rāvaṇa slipped into the hermitage and abducted Sītā. On the way, Jaṭāyu, the king of the vultures, tried to stop him, but was mortally wounded. Rāma, missing Sītā in the hermitage, ran out and was informed by Jaṭāyu about the abduction. Shortly afterwards Rāma met the prince of the monkeys, Sugrīva, who promised to help him provided Rāma killed Vālī, the king of the monkeys, and made Sugrīva king. Rāma killed Vālī by unfair means, and thus Sugrīva became his ally. A monkey-messenger, Hanumān, was sent to learn Sītā's whereabouts, and returned with the news that Sītā was pining away in Rāvaṇa's house. With an army of monkeys from Kiṣkindhyā, Rāma proceeded against Rāvaṇa, and on the way met Vibhīṣaṇa, Rāvaṇa's brother, who had been expelled from Laṅkā by him. Vibhīṣaṇa promised to guide Rāma to Laṅkā and Rāma's army crossed the sea. A terrible battle followed in which Indrajit and Kumbhakarna distinguished themselves on Rāvaṇa's side, while on the other side, besides Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, there were several brave monkey-leaders. The battle, of course, ended disastrously for Rāvaṇa; and his generals and he himself were killed. Sītā was rescued, and accompanied by her and Lakṣmaṇa Rāma went back to Ayodhyā to rule there in peace.

Some stories are said to be of the far past; and among them the most famous ones are those of Devayānī<sup>1</sup> and Śakuntalā. Devayānī's story falls into two parts, one relating her

<sup>1</sup> As many characters in this story are superhuman, it should perhaps be described among "the stories of the gods", which, in an advanced form, are often modelled upon or, at least, influenced by heroic stories.

adventures with Kaca, and the other those with Yayāti. In the past there were mighty battles between the Devas and the Asuras for the sovereignty of the universe. Bṛhaspati was the priest of the Devas and Śukra of the Asuras. Now the Asuras had an advantage over the Devas in this, that their priest, Śukra, knew the science of *sañjīvanī* or bringing the dead back to life, so that all the dead Asuras were revived by him. Then the Devas deputed Kaca, Bṛhaspati's son, to go to Śukra, and, if possible, to learn from him this valuable science. Kaca became Śukra's disciple; and both Śukra and his daughter, Devayānī, were pleased with his conduct and behaviour. One day, however, the Asuras saw him in the fields tending his preceptor's kine, and immediately killed him and gave his body to the wolves. When Devayānī missed Kaca, she told her father that she could not live without him; and Śukra, with his *mantra* (magic verses), revived Kaca. The Asuras killed him a second time, and he was again revived by Śukra. The third time they burnt his body, and, mixing the ashes with wine, gave it to Śukra to drink. When this time Śukra called him Kaca replied from within his stomach. Śukra found that Kaca's coming out would mean his own death; so he taught him the *sañjīvanī mantra* that Kaca might revive him when he came out; and this Kaca did. When the period of his discipleship was over, Kaca wanted to go back; but Devayānī confessed her love for him and asked him to marry her. This he would not do; he returned to the Devas with his newly acquired knowledge.

Some time after this, when Śarmiṣṭhā, the daughter of the Asura king Vṛṣaparvan, Devayānī and some others were bathing in a lake, their clothes left on the bank were mixed up by the wind. On getting up Śarmiṣṭhā put on Devayānī's clothes by mistake and there was a violent quarrel, when Śarmiṣṭhā taunted Devayānī with being the daughter of one who merely chanted the praises of her father; and finally Śarmiṣṭhā threw her into a well. Shortly afterwards Yayāti, the son of Nahuṣa, came to that well, and seeing Devayānī there raised her up. She met her maid-servant, and sent her to tell her father how she had been ill used. Śukra was angry and wanted to leave the court of Vṛṣaparvan, who, in order to retain him, promised to do anything

Devayānī wished. Devayānī wanted Śarmiṣṭhā for her waiting maid, and this she had to become. Sometime later Devayānī and her companions went into the forest and again came across Yayāti. On learning who he was, Devayānī offered him her hand. Yayāti consulted Śukra, who advised him to marry Devayānī; whereupon he took her to wife. Śarmiṣṭhā accompanied Devayānī to Yayāti's home, and one day in the course of a conversation with Yayāti she persuaded him that her friend's husband could be looked on as her own husband, too. Yayāti accepted her suggestion, but knowing Devayānī's temper, he kept the matter a secret from her. In course of time he had two sons, Yadu and Turvasu, by Devayānī, and three, Druhyu, Anu, and Pūru, by Śarmiṣṭhā. One day one of these latter addressed Yayāti as father in Devayānī's presence, and thus she came to know everything. Furious at this, she went back to her father, and Śukra cursed Yayāti with decrepitude.

Śakuntalā also is placed in the far past. She is said to be the daughter of Viśvāmitra and an Apsarā, Menakā. The mother had left the new-born baby on the bank of a river, where it was found by the sage Kaṇva. Kaṇva took her to his hermitage, and brought her up there as his daughter. Years afterwards, when Śakuntalā was grown up, king Duṣmanta (Duṣyanta) one day lost his way while hunting in the forest and came to Kaṇva's hermitage. Kaṇva was away and Śakuntalā received him. He was so much struck with her beauty that he wanted to marry her immediately according to the Gandharva form. Śakuntalā would not consent until he promised that her son would be the heir-apparent. Duṣmanta went away and Śakuntalā's son was born in the hermitage. When he was about six Śakuntalā was advised by Kaṇva to go to her husband. She took her son, Bharata, with her and proceeded to Duṣmanta's court. The king disclaimed all knowledge of herself or her son, and Śakuntalā was leaving in anger when it was proclaimed through supernatural means that Bharata was Duṣmanta's son. Then Duṣmanta had to ask his wife to forgive him, and instal Bharata as his heir-apparent; and Bharata was the ancestor of a line of mighty kings.

The story of the birth and the early life of Devavrata Bhīṣma seems to have been popular. King Śāntanu of

Hastināpura was out hunting and was wandering along the banks of the Ganges when he saw a beautiful maiden. He wanted to marry her, but she would consent only on condition that he would never interfere with any of her acts. After their marriage as soon as a child was born, she threw it into the Ganges; and this she did to seven children, one after another. But when she was about to throw the eighth the king prevented her. Thereupon she left the king; but before leaving she revealed that she was Gaṅgā (Ganges), and that her sons had been heavenly beings, the Vasus, who had fallen through a curse. She had thrown them into the river, desiring them to return to heaven as soon as possible. Gaṅgā went away, but her son,<sup>1</sup> Devavrata, grew up to be a strong and learned prince. Some years passed, and Śāntanu, while wandering about, met another beautiful maiden, Satyawatī, whom he wanted to marry. Her father, a fisherman, would give her to him only on condition that her son was to be the king's successor. As, however, Devavrata was alive, the king could not promise that and he came away in great grief. Devavrata noticed his father's melancholy and on coming to know the reason, he himself went to the fisherman and promised him that he would never lay any claim to the kingdom. The fisherman wanted to be more certain about his daughter's future, and he had fears that though Devavrata might relinquish the kingdom, his children might create trouble. On that he took a further vow that he would never marry, but remain a Brahmacārin all his life. Śāntanu had two children by Satyawatī, Citrāṅgada and Vicitravīrya. The former succeeded his father, but was soon slain in a battle with the Gandharvas. The latter, though still a boy, was installed as king by Devavrata, who was now known as Bhīṣma. Some time afterwards Bhīṣma got to know that the daughters of the king of Kāśī were having a *svayamvara* for the choice of a husband. He went to the assembly of princes, seized the three maidens, put them on his chariot, and drove away, afterwards challenging the other princes to fight him if they dared. They rushed against him, but Bhīṣma was more than a match for all of them, including Śālva. Bhīṣma took the maidens to Satyawatī and arrangements

<sup>1</sup> The *Mbh.* (i, 100) story evidently combines two versions and it is not clear whether Gaṅgā left her son with Śāntanu or not.

were made for marrying them to Vicitravīrya. Ambā, the eldest of them, told Satyavatī that she wanted to marry Śālva, and at her solicitations they allowed her to go away to her chosen prince. He, however, would have nothing to do with a girl who had been carried off by another prince. She did not know what to do; but meeting the Brāhmin hero, Paraśu Rāma, she persuaded him to adopt her cause and make Bhīṣma take her back. As Bhīṣma refused to do that Rāma fought with Bhīṣma; but he was worsted after a long and terrible encounter. Ambā, foiled in her plans of revenge, entered into a life of severe austerities and finally sacrificed herself on the funeral pyre to gain her object.

Some stories of the *Mahābhārata* are not heroic stories; and the tone is different. Such, for example, is the popular story of Sāvitrī and Satyavān, a story with a definitely religious note. Aśvapati, king of the Madras, did not have a child till he was somewhat advanced in years. Then he had a daughter through the grace of the goddess Sāvitrī, and named her after the goddess. When his daughter was grown up, Aśvapati asked her to seek out a husband fit to be her partner. Attended by some of her father's counsellors, she went about the hermitages of royal sages, in search of a husband. On returning she reported to her father that she had chosen Satyavān, son of the blind Dyumatsena, who had formerly ruled in Śālva, but had been driven out of his kingdom when he was helpless through blindness. The sage Nārada, who was then present in Aśvapati's court, dissuaded Sāvitrī from the marriage; for Satyavān, though endowed with all noble qualities, had one serious defect, namely that he was to die within a year. Sāvitrī, however, had chosen once for all and would not have anyone else for her husband. So Aśvapati went to Dyumatsena's hermitage and made arrangements for the marriage. After her marriage, Sāvitrī counted the days of the year; and when the day of her husband's death drew near she observed the Trirātra vow, fasting for three nights. Then on the day when the year was complete, she begged permission from her father-in-law to accompany her husband when he went out for daily work in the forest. They had not been long out when Satyavān had a bad headache; so he lay down, resting his head on his wife's lap. Soon a tall person in red appeared. He said he was

Yama and had come to take away her husband; and he drew out of Satyavān's body a person of the measure of a thumb, bound it with a noose and started to go away. Sāvitrī followed him, in spite of his dissuasions, and so pleased him with her talk that he granted her several boons—the restoration of his eyesight and kingdom to her father-in-law, one hundred sons to her father and herself, and finally her husband's life for four hundred years. He went away and Sāvitrī turned back to the place where Satyavān's body was lying. He soon woke up, and they returned to the hermitage to find that Yama's promises had all been fulfilled.

Then there are the priestly stories of Dhaumya and his three disciples, Āruṇi, Upamanyu, and Veda, as also<sup>1</sup> of Veda and Utaṅka, where the point is the unbounded reverence the disciple has for the preceptor. The story of Vasiṣṭha and Viśvāmitra is more important<sup>2</sup> as their quarrel is said to originate in the latter's desire to possess a splendid cow of Vasiṣṭha's. Moreover, the strength of the Kṣatriya is here turned against the Brāhmaṇa. This Kṣatriya-Brāhmaṇa interest must have operated in the handling of the stories of Purūravas and Nahuṣa. But the story of the former's adventures, including his love for Urvaśī, as well as of Nahuṣa's greatness, we have only in bare outline. The story of Uśinara<sup>3</sup> and his consideration for one who has sought his protection is used mainly to point a moral. Indra, in the shape of a hawk, comes to the king and begs of him his possessions, his flesh, and even himself; and the king is willing to give all these.

In the story of Agastya and Lopamudrā<sup>4</sup> as well as in that of Cyavana and Sukanyā,<sup>5</sup> a ṛṣi (sage) marries a king's daughter, but the latter story is more interesting because it brings in the rivalry between men and gods for the love of beautiful maidens. The two Aśvins desire Sukanyā's love, and ask her to choose one out of the three—they two and Cyavana who has been restored to youth and beauty through their grace. Sukanyā chooses the right person, and Cyavana later on gives offerings to the Aśvins to the neglect of Indra. The latter's anger is roused, and he tries to prevent the

<sup>1</sup> *Mbh.*, i, 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Mbh.*, i, 177.

<sup>3</sup> *iii*, 131. The story is told of Śivi in *iii*, 197. We may compare the mention of Śivi, son of Uśinara, in *i*, 93, and *vii*, 56.

<sup>4</sup> *iii*, 96 ff.

<sup>5</sup> *iii*, 122-4.

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offerings reaching the *Aśvins*; but he is powerless against *Cyavana*.

The story of *Tapatī*<sup>1</sup> describes the love of a mortal king for a celestial maiden. *Tapatī*, the daughter of *Sūrya* (the sun-god), was seen by *Samvaraṇa* when he was out hunting in the woods on the mountains. Seeing her matchless beauty he wanted to have her as wife; but she vanished and the king fell down on the ground. She reappeared, told him who she was and explained that she could not marry without her father's consent. She disappeared, to the great grief of *Samvaraṇa*; but she finally became his wife through the efforts of the sage *Vasiṣṭha*.

Various heroes are mentioned in the *Droṇa Parva* (50 ff.); yet it is difficult to conjecture the life-history of these from the brief mention there. The story of *Ruru* and *Pramadvarā* (i, 9) is an interesting complement to that of *Sāvitrī*, as it shows a husband ready to sacrifice his life to save that of his wife. Then there are the purely mythological stories like those of *Gaḍura* in Bk. i (16 ff.), of *Skanda* in the third book (ch. 225 ff.), and of the churning of the ocean in the first book (17 ff.).

Something must be said here of the scenes of the various heroic stories and the nationalities to which the different characters belonged. In the main story the contending parties of the *Kurus* and the *Pāṇḍavas* are said to belong to the same family, but the *Pāṇḍavas* had their capital at *Indraprastha*, near modern *Delhi*, while the *Kauravas*' chief town was farther north at *Hastināpura*. In the great battle they had allies from all parts of India. Following *Mr. Pargiter's* analysis<sup>2</sup> we may classify them in this order.

The chief *Pāṇḍava* allies were *Drupada*, the *Pāñcāla* king and *Virāṭa* of the *Matsyas*. The latter had his capital at *Upaplavya*, to the south-west of *Indraprastha*, while the *Pāñcālas* probably occupied a tract corresponding to modern *Rohilkhand*. Along with *Drupada* and *Virāṭa* are mentioned<sup>3</sup> *Dhr̥ṣṭaketu*, king of *Cedi*, ruling in the tract south-east of *Mathurā*, south of the *Yamunā*; *Sahadeva* of *Magadha*, corresponding to a part of modern *Behar*; *Yuyudhāna Sātyaki* ruling in *Ānarta* in *Gujarat*; *Cekitāna*, another prince of that tract; the *Kaikeya* princes, headed by

<sup>1</sup> i, 178 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *JRAS.* (1908), p. 309 H.

<sup>3</sup> Bk. v.

Bṛhatkṣatra, from the land between the Indus (Sindhu) and the Jhelum (Viitastā), and perhaps the king of Pāṇḍya from the far south.

The chief Kaurava allies were: Karṇa, king of Aṅga, to the east of Magadha; Bhagadatta of Prāgyjyotiṣa, to the north-east of Aṅga, Jayadratha from the southern Indus-plains; Śalya of Madra, between the Rāvi (Irāvati) and the Chenab (Candrabhāgā); Kṛtavarman the Bhoja from the Nerbuda-valley; Nila of Māhiṣmatī from the same tract; Vinda and Anuvinda of Avanti, to the north-west of the Vindhya; and Sudakṣiṇa the Kāmboja from the extreme north-west.

With most of the episodes mentioned above it is more difficult to settle the matter of scene and nationality, for many of the episodes relate to the past and a tribe may not have borne the same name then as in later times. We have also to take account of the migrations of tribes and one tribe may not have occupied the same tract in earlier times that it did later on. The difficulty is no doubt there even with the main story, but it is intensified in connection with the episodes, where all conclusions about the scenes of the events must be problematic.

In the story of Damayantī the heroine is the daughter of Bhīma, the king of Vidarbha, and Nala is the prince of the Niṣadhas. A Bhīma Vaidarbha is mentioned in the *Āitareya Brāhmaṇa* (vii, 34), and Vidarbha mentioned in the *Jaiminiya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa* (ii, 440) is probably to be identified with modern Berar. The *Vedic Index* (i, 461) points out that in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (ii, 3, 2, 1, 2) Naiṣidha is the epithet of Naḍa, a king of the south. It is tempting to identify him with the hero of our story and locate the Niṣadhas to the west of the Vidarbhas, between the Narmadā and the Tāptī.

The scene of the Rāma-story is laid in different and widely separated areas of India. Rāma's father ruled in Ayodhyā, corresponding to modern Oudh, and Sītā was the daughter of the king of Videha in North Behar, Videha lying to the north of the Ganges on both sides of the Gaṇḍak. Rāvaṇa ruled in Laṅkā (Ceylon) and Rāma had to cross the whole length of India to lead the expedition against him.

The stories of Devayānī and Śakuntalā deal with the ancestors of Duryodhana. Duṣmanta is definitely described



(*Mbh.*, i, 74, 11) as ruling at Hastināpura, and Yayāti must have belonged to the same tract. Neither Śakuntalā nor Devayāni belonged to any royal family; and the latter is regarded as of superhuman lineage. Hence it is not possible to locate the events of these stories, though one can do it fairly easily with the doings of Bhīṣma in the story of the daughters of Kāśirāja. Bhīṣma was the grand-uncle of the Kaurava princes of the main story and Kāśirāja probably ruled over the province round about Benares.

\* \* \*

Many of these heroic stories were utilized by the dramatists. Thus Śriharṣa used the Nala-story in the *Naiṣadhīya*; Kālidāsa the Śakuntalā-story in his *Śakuntalā*, while that of Arjuna's adventures with the Kirāta (*Mbh.*, iii, 39 ff.) were handled by Bhāravi in *Kirātārjunīyam*. Śisupāla's quarrel with Kṛṣṇa (ii, 37 ff.) was utilized with Māgha; and the story of Rāma was a popular one with various poets after the beginning of the Christian era. Still, for the oldest versions of the stories we do not rely on these works, but turn mainly to the *Mahābhārata* and partly also to the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Purāṇas*.

## CHAPTER II

### THE RECORDS OF THE INDIAN HEROIC AGE

THE great storehouse of Indian heroic tradition, as, indeed, of many other traditions, is the *Mahābhārata*. As the popular saying has it : what is not in *Bhārata* (*Mahābhārata*) is not in *Bhārata* (India). This composite character of the voluminous work makes the task of the investigator of the Indian Heroic Age very difficult, and the difficulties are increased by the absence of a really standard text. The two main editions of the *Mahābhārata* at present are the Calcutta one of 1889 and the Bombay one of 1868. There are no vital differences between these two editions, which seem to represent the same recension. For the eighteen books, the Bombay edition has about 200 ślokas more than the Calcutta one, but omits the *Harivaṃśa*, which was included as a sort of supplement in the Calcutta edition. Quite a distinct recension is represented by the Madras edition of 1855-60, printed in Telugu characters. This South Indian recension has been reprinted later, but it still requires careful editing, especially as it is materially different from the northern recension in a good many points. That these differences indicate the existence of a distinct southern recension was early suggested by Dr. Winternitz,<sup>1</sup> from an examination of two manuscripts in the Whish collection—one a Grantha manuscript and the other a Malayalam one. Comparing these with the standard texts he found additions, omissions, and variations in the order of verses. The story of Gaṇeśa writing the *Mahābhārata* is omitted, and the story of Kadru and Vinatā is more intelligible than in the Calcutta or Bombay text. The stories of Rāhu and Śakuntalā are omitted as well, but it is possible that in the South Indian recension the latter was included in one of the later *Adhyāyas*. However that may be, an examination of the various *Mahābhārata* manuscripts convinced Dr. Winternitz that “there is as much difference between the Northern and

<sup>1</sup> *JRAS*, 1898, pp. 147 ff.

South Indian recensions of the *Mahābhārata* as between the different recensions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*”,<sup>1</sup> and the South Indian recension is neither longer nor shorter than the Nāgari editions.

In recent years the Bhandarkar Research Institute of Poona has been trying to bring out an authoritative text of the *Mahābhārata* with the help of scholars like Dr. Winternitz. In their attempt to do this they have taken stock of the manuscripts available. The fullest list of such manuscripts is to be found in Aufrecht's catalogue, which is supplemented by the Trivandrum or Ananatasayana catalogue; but these do not include some important manuscripts like Bendall's Nepalese one. The Institute prospectus mentions a total of 1,284 manuscripts for the *Mahābhārata* and the *Harivaṃśa*, of which 610 come from South India and 77 from Bengal. There are about 200 manuscripts in the different libraries of Europe, the India Office alone having 56. Some of the South Indian manuscripts are in Devanāgarī characters; but most of them are in scripts peculiar to the Madras Presidency. Of these 1,300 manuscripts, only a few contain the whole work; but an examination of all these will have to be made before one can settle the question whether there were different recensions for different parts of India.

The Bhandarkar Institute have so far brought out only one book of the *Mahābhārata*—the *Virāṭa Parva*. In their effort to fix the text of this book they have relied on the Calcutta and Bombay editions, as well as on several good manuscripts.<sup>2</sup> Of these latter, one has got the date *Samvat*, 1493 (A.D. 1436), and the characters are in old Nāgarī. Another also in Nāgarī characters with *prṣṭhamātrās* is dated *Samvat* 14 Chaitra; but the page is damaged and it has been conjectured that the two figures are the first two of the original date. The third manuscript is much more modern; but it gives the whole of the *Mahābhārata* and the different *parvas* must have been written at different times. Various other manuscripts are mentioned; but none of them seems older than the fifteenth century. For our purposes, till the work of the Bhandarkar Institute is completed, we have to depend on the Calcutta and the Bombay editions.

<sup>1</sup> *JRAS*, 1898, p. 149.

<sup>2</sup> pp. iv ff. of *Introduction to Virāṭa Parva* (Bhandarkar Institute).

Now this text itself shows signs of having grown by additions and accretions. In different parts, the *Mahābhārata* is said to be of different lengths. Thus in i, 1, 81, Sauti says he knows 8,800 verses and so do Śuka and perhaps Sañjaya; and this has been taken by Maedonell and Weber to denote the original length of the work. i, 1, 101 says that Vyāsa originally compiled the work in 24,000 verses, and "this much only is called by the learned the real *Bhārata*". Finally, i, 2, gives the number of verses in each *parva*; and the total here, as also the total on counting up the actual number of verses in the existing versions of the different *parvas*, comes up to about 100,000 verses if we include the *Harivaṃśa*.

An examination of the stories recorded in the *Mahābhārata* will verify the gradual growth of the whole work, for there are different and inconsistent versions of the same story in different parts. Let us take the description of Pāṇḍu's death. i, 125 tells us that after his death in the forest his two wives had an argument as to who should accompany the king and burn herself on the funeral pyre. Mādrī sacrificed herself and was burnt on the same pyre as her husband. The next chapter, however, says that ascetics living in the forest resolved to carry the bodies of Pāṇḍu and Mādrī to Hastināpura, the chief city of the Kurus. They did this, and the bodies of the king and the queen were burnt there with elaborate ceremonies. That the bodies were intact when the ascetics reached the city is evident from passages like: They then besmeared his body with various perfumes . . . They dressed it in a white raiment of *deśaja* (country-made or as appropriate in the country) fabric; so dressed, the king looked as though he were still living—the tiger-like hero seemed only asleep on a costly bed (i, 127, 18 ff.).<sup>1</sup> This certainly indicates a combination of two versions, in one of which the cremation of Pāṇḍu took place in the forest, while in the other his body was carried to his relatives for the ceremony.

Or we may take the story of Arjuna's life in the forest, in i, 216 ff. Arjuna went into banishment according to the agreement that whichever of the brothers violated a certain

<sup>1</sup> *Tatastasya śarirantu sarva gandhādhipāsitam . . .  
Athainam deśajaiḥ śuklairvāsobhiḥ samyojayan  
Samchannam sa tu vāsobhirjivanniva narādhipaḥ  
śuśubhe sa naravyāghro mahārha-śayanocitaḥ.*

rule about their relations with the common wife would have to lead the life of a Brahmacārin and practise the restraint of an ascetic in the forest for twelve years. Yet, as Hopkins points out, the life led by him during this period is very different from that of an ascetic. Entering into marriage relations with a sea-nymph, Ulūpī, and a princess Citrāṅgadā, or forcibly carrying off another princess, Subhadrā, in order to marry her should not have entered into the programme of a Brahmacārin. But the text as we have it never suggests that in marrying Citrāṅgadā or Subhadrā, Arjuna, violated the original agreement; here, too, it seems that the adventures have been made to follow the vow of Brahmacarya through a mistake of some compiler of the work. There was probably one tradition about Arjuna's violation of a rule and consequent exile and a distinct tradition about his love-adventures in the course of some wanderings; and these two have been combined in the present version in such a way as to produce an incongruous effect.

Another tale cited by Hopkins<sup>1</sup> shows the inconsistencies very clearly. In iii, 12, Draupadī is made to narrate the story of the manœuvres of Duryodhana to kill the Pāṇḍavas. On one occasion he set fire to the house where the Pāṇḍavas were sleeping with their mother. Terrified by the flames, Kuntī cried out that they were all going to be destroyed. Thereupon Bhīma supported his mother on the left side and Yudhiṣṭhira on the right, Nakula and Sahadeva on his shoulders and Arjuna on his back; and with this burden he cleared the fire at one leap and thus saved them all from the fire. In the First Book, however, there are three references to the same story, every one representing a different version. In i, 2, and 61, a bare summary of the story is given. According to that, the Pāṇḍavas, suspecting the design of Duryodhana, built an underground passage (suruṅga) as a means of escape from the house; one night they themselves set fire to the house and escaped by the suruṅga. i, 50, gives the story in detail; and there we learn of the deliberate precautions taken by the Pāṇḍavas, precautions to make Duryodhana think that they had been burnt. We also learn that after they had come out of the passage, some of them were feeling the effect of sleeplessness and fear. Bhīma

<sup>1</sup> *Great Epic of India*, pp. 372 ff.

supported his mother on his shoulder, the twins (Nakula and Sahadeva) on his sides, and Yudhiṣṭhira and Arjuna on his arms, and so marched on. These are evidently different versions of the story, and Hopkins thinks<sup>1</sup> that the use of the word "suruṅga" (or suraṅga), a word derived from Greek "syrinx", marks the lateness of one version. But as against this it must be pointed out that this version represents the Pāṇḍavas in a very unfavourable light, and does not attempt to gloss over their sin in causing an innocent woman to be burnt with her sons. This, as we shall see later on, would perhaps suggest that the version of i, 150, was the earlier one. Draupadī's account in the third book may be the reflection of a later legend with an exaggeration of the natural strength of Bhīma and an emphasis on the flying powers of the son of the wind-god, for that was the reputed parentage of Bhīma—such an exaggeration being necessarily the product of the imagination of later ages.

A minor instance of such an inconsistency may be observed in the story of Kadru and her sons. Kadru wanted her sons to help her in practising a deception on her sister, Vinatā. According to i, 20, they refused to do so; and Kadru cursed them, saying that they would all be consumed by fire at the snake-sacrifice of Janamejaya. Brahmā approved of the curse, which, it would seem from i, 13, etc., was fulfilled. But i, 22 ff., tell us that the Nāgas, Kadru's sons, decided to obey their mother, and carried out the deception on Vinatā. This, too, is evidently a mixture of two versions.

It is easy to multiply instances of such glaring inconsistencies; but perhaps it would be instructive to examine some stories the varying versions of which show a difference in tone rather than in incidents. The story of Nahuṣa is one of the most instructive instances in point. In i, 75, 26 ff., we are told that he ruled his kingdom with great virtue and supported equally the Ṛṣis, the Gandharvas, the Brāhmaṇas, the Kṣatriyas, and the Vaiśyas. Moreover, it goes on:—

"Sa hatvā dasyusaṅghātanaṁ karamādapayat  
Paśuvaccaiva tām prṣṭhe vāhayāmāsa vīryavān  
Kārayāmāsa cendratvamabhibhūya divoukasaḥ  
Tejasā tapasā caiva vikrameṇoujasā tathā."

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 372.

This has been taken to mean: "He suppressed all the robbers with a mighty hand; he made them pay tribute to the Ṛṣis and carry them on their back as beasts of burden.<sup>1</sup> Surpassing the very dwellers in heaven with his beauty, his asceticism, his prowess and energy, he reigned like Indra." There does not seem to be anything but praise for Nahuṣa here and he seems to be the ideal king. But iii, 179 ff., throw a different light on him. An enormous serpent which had seized and overpowered Bhīma reveals that he was formerly the king Nahuṣa, and that by sacrifices, asceticism, the study of the Vedas, self-control and prowess, he easily gained mastery over the three worlds. The Brahmarṣis, the celestials, the Gandharvas, the Yakṣas, the Rākṣasas, the Pannagas and all the inhabitants of the three worlds had to pay him taxes. Having attained this position he was highly elated with pride, and employed thousands of Brāhmaṇas to bear his palanquin. One day when the sage Agastya was bearing his palanquin, his feet touched Agastya's body; whereupon Agastya in his anger cursed him and changed him into a serpent. In xiii, 99 ff., we get what is almost a variant of this second version. The scene is here definitely laid in heaven. Nahuṣa attained the kingdom of heaven through his meritorious deeds on earth. For a time he carried on his duties in the proper fashion; though he was the lord of the celestials he paid due regard to the other celestials. But soon he became inflated with pride through the idea that he was Indra. He employed the sages to carry him about and gave up the performance of Yajñas, etc. The sages had to carry him by turn and one day Agastya's turn came. Bhṛgu, another famous sage, was then with him. Bhṛgu explained to him that though Prajāpati (Brahmā) had set Nahuṣa in Indra's place, he (Brahmā) was now enraged at his conduct and had commissioned Bhṛgu to degrade Nahuṣa and reinstate Indra as the lord of heaven. Then, of course, Bhṛgu carried out his commission and Nahuṣa was transformed into a serpent.

This last version evidently connects a story of the dethronement of Indra with Nahuṣa's reign in heaven for a time, and his wicked behaviour with the sages. Very much light is thrown on this story in v, 9 ff.: Tvaṣṭṛ, the lord of beings, had

<sup>1</sup> The interpretation of this second verse is disputed.

a son, who by his asceticism seemed to threaten Indra's position among the celestials; and Indra, failing to tempt him to lust, killed him with his thunderbolt. Tvaṣṭṛ thereupon created the giant Vṛtra to avenge the death of his son. There was a fierce contest between Vṛtra and Indra; but in practically every encounter Indra had the worst of it. Peace was then brought about between the two and Indra promised that he would not try to slay Vṛtra either in the daytime or at night, with a dry thing or a wet one, with a piece of stone or wood, with a weapon from a distance or in a hand-to-hand fight. One evening, however, seeing Vṛtra on the sea-coast, Indra threw at him a huge mass of sea-foam with the thunderbolt and slew him. Mainly for the sin of breaking the spirit of his promise Indra was deprived of his right senses. He left the heavens and hid himself in a lotus-stalk in the lake. Then for a time the heavenly regions were lordless, until the gods decided to anoint Nahuṣa as their king.

For a while things fared well with Nahuṣa and he enjoyed himself to his heart's content in the pleasure-gardens of the gods, in the seas or in the lakes, surrounded by nymphs and fairies. One day he happened to see Śacī, Indra's queen, and he desired that she should come and attend on him. Śacī sought the protection of Bṛhaspati, the preceptor of the gods, against the advances of Nahuṣa. The other gods, all afraid of Nahuṣa, sought to bring her to choose Nahuṣa as her husband. On Bṛhaspati's advice she asked for some time to decide; and the gods began to deliberate how to restore Indra. With Viṣṇu's help they discovered the means of curing Indra of his disorder and freeing him from the burden of sin. The story might have ended here with the restoration of Indra and the dethronement of Nahuṣa; but it proceeds in a rambling way. The episode of the Rṣis (sages) as carriers is brought in and this is said to lead to Nahuṣa's destruction and Indra's return.

What is approximately the same version of the story in a shorter form is found in xii, 342, the variations being: (1) that Vṛtra could be slain only with a weapon made of the bones of a great sage, Dadhici—a weapon made primarily to slay his father, Viśvarūpa. (2) Indra's sin lay solely in slaying two Brāhmaṇas—Viśvarūpa and Vṛtra. Hence his disgrace. xii, 281 ff., discuss in detail this sin of Indra's in



slaying Vṛtra, the great sin of Brāhmaṇicide. iii, 101, too, throws some light on part of the story, on the slaying of Vṛtra by Indra. Indra hurled his thunderbolt made of the bones of Dadhici at Vṛtra, but not being certain that he had killed the dreaded being, he fled in fear to take shelter in a lake. There is no question here of his having committed any sin, and Tvaṣṭṛ, being the maker of the weapon designed to slay the demon, is represented as having no sympathies for Vṛtra.

It seems to me that in the version of the fifth book (combined perhaps with iii, 101), we have the story in its original form, rehandled by later people to suit their own notions. In Indra's exile either through fear or through the sin of falsehood, in Nahuṣa's elevation and his fall through desiring the queen of heaven, we have a genuine heroic story.<sup>1</sup> It sets up the great heroes of the world as the rivals of the gods, and regards the gods in the same light as great men of this earth. Parallels to this may be found in the heroic legends of Greece as well as of Scandinavia—the story of Ixion and that of Ollerus as narrated by Saxo being very much to the point. But probably the pure heroic form of the story did not satisfy a later redactor who knew a version of Nahuṣa's having behaved very badly to the Brāhmaṇas. As a matter of fact, neither Nahuṣa's grandfather, Purūravas, nor his son, Yayāti, seems to have been popular with the Brāhmaṇas. About Purūravas we are told that he lost his head through the pride of his power and quarrelled with the Brāhmaṇas, caring little for their anger. He went so far as to rob them of their wealth and was ultimately slain through their curses (i, 75, 20–2). Yayāti did not treat his Brāhmaṇa wife, the daughter of the sage Śukra, as well as she deserved and was condemned by Śukra to undergo premature decrepitude. Again, when retiring to the forest, he left the throne not to his eldest son, a son by Śukra's daughter, but to a younger son by another wife. It seems that Purūravas, Nahuṣa and Yayāti upheld their position as kings and kept the priests in their proper place (according to heroic standards). The later

<sup>1</sup> We have the Kṣatriya version in Indra's exile through *fear*. The exile through *sin* seems to show priestly influence; but even this version of Indra's exile and Nahuṣa's elevation must be earlier than the story of Nahuṣa's treatment of the Rṣis. Thus there is the earliest heroic version, followed by different strata of Brāhmaṇic influence.

redactors therefore wanted to connect Nahuṣa's treatment of the Ṛsis with his fall from heaven ; and the latter event was put down as due to the agency not of the gods but of the Ṛsis.

The examination of different versions of this story has helped us to appreciate that there are different layers in this composite work, the Mahābhārata. It has led us a little farther, too, and helped us to understand a difference in the outlook on life. The one we may call the heroic or Kṣatriya outlook lays stress on the value of action. The other regards the Brāhmaṇa as the embodiment of divinity and an insult to a priest is looked on as the worst sin. In the one Nahuṣa's ascendancy is due to his heroism and energy ; Indra's fall to a cowardly fear. It emphasizes the value of protecting the weak and the evil that so often resulted from kings not respecting the marriage tie of others. In the other everything hinges on the layman's behaviour to the priest. Indra's fall is due to his slaying one Brāhmaṇa, Nahuṣa's disgrace to an insult offered to others.

The whole thing, perhaps, illustrates the struggle for supremacy between the two classes—at any rate a jealousy between the two—the warrior and the priest, the Kṣatriya and the Brāhmaṇa. It is well illustrated in the quarrel of Śarmiṣṭhā, the daughter of a king, with Devayāni, the daughter of his preceptor (i, 78). The latter thinks she is the more important person as the daughter of the sage, but the former silences her by saying that she is the daughter of one who merely chants the king's praises. The quarrel of Vasiṣṭha and Viśvāmitra (i, 177 ff.) may be a reflection of the same thing ; but for our purposes, Śarmiṣṭhā's remark is the most instructive. It gives us some idea as to how the old heroic tradition must have been preserved. Later on we shall have to discuss in detail the question of minstrelsy. Here we need simply point out that there must have been two essentially different types of minstrels : one, the king's court minstrel, the Sūta, whose sole business was to sing for the delectation of a courtly audience, an audience which did not at all trouble itself about theology or metaphysics but was only interested in heroic deeds and stories of prowess ; the other, the Śukra type of the bard, was more concerned with philosophy and didacticism. The old heroic tales

they could not omit; but they varnished and re-varnished them to suit their own ideals.

This difference between the didactic and the heroic parts of the *Mahābhārata* is easily perceived. Things like the twelfth and thirteenth books have very little of the heroic element; and it is acknowledged practically by all that they must be late additions due to the priestly carriers of tradition. To them also must be ascribed the portion of the sixth book known as *Bhagavad Gītā*, while we have fairly long pieces here and there<sup>1</sup> which have nothing to do with heroic tradition. The process by which the main didactic portions were added to an older work has been fully explained by Hopkins,<sup>2</sup> and we need not go over it here. Nor need we dwell on the incongruities introduced through the later Ahimsā doctrine, which seems to have troubled some reciters of these stories.<sup>3</sup> We must, however, notice a distinction Hopkins draws between two kinds of additions: (1) "A natural expansion of matter already extant", and (2) "the unnatural addition of new material". "The twelfth book may serve as a type of the latter, the eighth of the former." As we shall have to discuss the first type of addition more fully in connection with minstrelsy, we need not go into it here in detail.

One set of incongruities, however, calls for our notice, and that is in the character and conduct of the heroes in the main story. It has been found on examination that the Pāṇḍavas, the ideal heroes of the epic, suffer from grave lapses of conduct just as the Kauravas do; and this has puzzled critics. Thus, while the Kauravas cheat at dice and have recourse to wicked stratagems to destroy their rivals, the latter do not always behave honourably. They cause an unfortunate woman to be burnt with her sons in the house of lac to give the impression that they themselves have been destroyed. Arjuna slays Karṇa when the latter is helpless through his chariot-wheels having sunk into the earth (viii, 90-1). Arjuna again interferes in a fight between Sātyaki and Bhūriśravas and kills the latter against all the laws of the game (vii, 142-3). Yudhiṣṭhira causes Droṇa to lay down his arms by telling him a lie; and Dhṛṣṭadyumna slays the unarmed Droṇa.

<sup>1</sup> Things like most of the *Tīrtha-Yātrā Parva* in Book III.

<sup>2</sup> *American Journal-Phil.*, vol. xix, and op. cit., *Gl. Epic*, p. 381.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Hopkins, op. cit., pp. 379 ff.

Arjuna learns that Bhīṣma will not wound Śikhaṇḍin and then placing Śikhaṇḍin before himself he proceeds to shower arrows on Bhīṣma, finally killing him. Bhīma strikes Duryodhana unfairly and slays him with what must be called a foul blow. Now, on most of these occasions the unfairness is condoned with the explanation that Kṛṣṇa, the incarnation of the divinity, justified or even counselled such conduct of the Pāṇḍavas and surely ordinary moral laws cannot be applied in judging the actions of the divine Kṛṣṇa. Hopkins suggests<sup>1</sup> that this denotes a development in the standard of morals; and where the older poet was content merely to describe the deeds of heroes, a later bard thought it incumbent on him to justify these deeds wherever they did not harmonize with his moral code. Hence his excuses and condonings. So Hopkins does not accept the older theory of Schroeder and Holtzmann, according to whom the original story had the Kurus as its heroes and the poem had been composed by some sorrowing child of Kuruland. Later bards saw the disadvantages of singing a song that painted the conquerors black; and they tried to invert the story, to thrust the Kurus into a subordinate position and make the victors the real heroes. The old story was, however, there; and they could not, in most cases, change the incidents in their narration. So they introduced the excuses.

Closely allied with this theory is the idea that the war was originally described as one between the Kurus and the Pāṇcālas. This contention is well brought out by Dr. Grierson,<sup>2</sup> who holds: (1) That in India there was a long struggle between the Brāhmaṇas and Kṣatriyas. (2) That the country to the east, south and west of Kuruland was unorthodox. (3) That the unorthodoxy was thought out and fostered by learned Kṣatriyas. (4) That some of these heterodox people had a home among Pāṇcālas. (5) That the Pāṇcālas permitted polyandry and their descendants do so now. (6) That the war was really due to the insult offered by the Pāṇcāla king, the Kṣatriya Drupada, to a Brāhmaṇa who sought the help of the Kurus. (7) That the *Mahābhārata* war is, in essence, a Kuru-Pāṇcāla war.

This contention has been disputed by Professor Keith,<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *JAOS*, xiii, pp 61 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *JRAS*, 1908, pp. 887 ff.

<sup>3</sup> *JRAS*, 1908, pp. 831 ff., and 1133 ff.

who holds that the *Mahābhārata* has meaning only as a Pāṇḍava epic—that for ethnography the work is of little use, “that it does not represent the victory of Kṣatriya over Brāhmaṇa or preserve a record of a time when Pāñcāla was unorthodox.”

Here I cannot go into the merits of the controversy. But the important fact is, that though the present version has its sympathies mainly for the Pāṇḍavas, the Kauravas are not absolutely evil, or rather, if the Kauravas have their defects, the Pāṇḍavas are not entirely blameless. And for this we may suggest an explanation based on the study of western heroic poetry. In the latter, with only a few exceptions, all persons of royal rank, including the opponents of the leading characters, are treated with respect and even with sympathy. In Teutonic poetry the only person painted as really bad is Eormenric, who belongs to the far past, being the earliest of the kings figuring in these poems. The descriptions of Thrytho and Heremod in *Beowulf* imply violence and cruelty; but in both cases the condemnation is qualified. We must of course exclude dialogues where a prince may be abused by his opponent as Guthhere is by Waldhere<sup>1</sup> or Hagen by the dying Siegfried.<sup>2</sup> But the minstrel is never definitely virulent against any character; and this is true of Greek heroic poetry too. As Professor Chadwick points out, if we except dialogues and references (especially in the *Nekyia*) to persons of the far past, “there is a noteworthy absence of any display of feeling against the opponents of the poet’s heroes—as much in the case of Penelope’s suitors as in that of the Trojans.”<sup>3</sup> We may think of Nestor’s account of Klytāimnestra (*Od.* iv, 263 ff.) where the tone is almost apologetic, as in the account of Thrytho in *Beowulf*, and we may remember the lenient treatment of Paris. As a matter of fact the most unfavourable light is thrown not on any human characters but on the gods.

The reason for this is fairly obvious. The heroic poems were meant to be recited at the courts not of one or two princes but of many. They were of what we should call international currency. Hence it would not pay the poet to paint any prince as absolutely black, for that would mean the banning of the

<sup>1</sup> Waldhere, *B. Ll.*, 23 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Heroic Age*, p. 229.

<sup>3</sup> *Nibelungen Lied*, xvi.

poem by his family as also by his kinsmen and friends. Moreover all princes would have a certain amount of class feeling and would not be likely to tolerate vilification of one of their own order, no matter if he was a complete stranger. The poet had therefore to try to keep the balance between good and evil in all instances; and perhaps the poet of the Kuru-Pāṇḍava story had to do the same thing. The Kurus might have lost their kingdom and been annihilated; but surely their friends ruled some parts of India. At any rate all the princes at whose courts the heroic songs were meant to be sung were members of a class to which the Kurus belonged and it would not do for the singer to represent the latter as entirely evil. He could not represent the Kurus as always in the wrong; he would have to sing of the instances in which they were wronged by their opponents, though if his sympathies were with the latter he might try to find extenuating circumstances for their wrong-doing. This is evident in the heroic story of the *Mahābhārata* as we have it.

We may close this examination of the *Mahābhārata* by noting how the task of the critic of the Indian Heroic Age has been made difficult by the accretion of different layers upon the main story of the epic. What was purely a heroic poem has been transformed into a "fifth Veda" and the spiritual interest is often made more prominent than the earthly. There has not only been an addition of extraneous matter, but a change in the tone of stories, a change due to altered social and moral standards.

The real difficulty is to separate the heroic ideal from the non-heroic and the theological; and the difficulty is most felt when the conception of a heroic character or the prominence of one seems to have been altered to suit non-heroic ideals. We feel this when examining the main story of the epic; for the king Yudhiṣṭhira, who is made to be the central figure in the present version, is certainly not the most heroic of the characters.<sup>1</sup> Arjuna is far more important as a hero; he distinguishes himself most in the trials of valour and he is in a class apart from the time of his tutelage when he was learning the use of arms from Droṇa,<sup>2</sup> to the time of the great

<sup>1</sup> Cf. his fight with Kṛtavarman (vii, 165); with Droṇa (vii, 162); with Karna (viii, 63), etc.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. e.g., i, 137; i, 140; i, 190, etc.

battle. Yudhiṣṭhira, on the other hand, is made to be the pattern of a virtuous prince, though here too inconsistencies are introduced through the intermixture of different ideals. One may cite instances of his selfishness and lapses from the moral code, but they are all condoned in the great epic. The point is, however, that as the centre of gravity is shifted from Arjuna to Yudhiṣṭhira, the epic becomes less heroic in nature. We may say that the radical defect of this epic is the same as what Ker found in Beowulf—that is, “a disproportion that puts the irrelevances in the centre and the serious things on the outer edges.”

In the case of Beowulf, of course, the irrelevances are the supernatural elements; Grendel and the dragon take up the position in the centre of the canvas, the position which should have been occupied by Ingeld and Hrothulf, by Onela and Ohthere.

With the *Mahābhārata* the irrelevances from our point of view are the didactic and moral episodes, and the abstract discussions, while the essential things are the deeds of Arjuna and Nala, of Karna and Rāma. Still the parallelism between Beowulf and our epic is not a good one, for it is more a matter of accident than anything else that in the one Anglo-Saxon heroic epic which has been preserved the subjects of human interest are thrust into the background. We may be sure that the poet of Beowulf felt a greater interest in human actions than in the depredations of monsters and dragons. But in the Sanskrit epic the heroic element seems to have been more or less suppressed deliberately in favour of the religious element; that is, a change has been made here, though not in Beowulf; and a better parallel to this shifting of the focus is to be found in parts of the Books of Judges, of Samuel and of Kings in the Old Testament, where the interest of the heroic deeds of the kings has also been very much obscured by the didactic interest of later narrators.

\* \* \*

Yet with all its irrelevances the *Mahābhārata* is the main source of our information with regard to the Heroic Age of India. There are other records to supplement the information supplied by the *Mahābhārata*, sometimes perhaps to check it; but for our purposes they can never be considered as important as the Great Epic. The most necessary among

these supplementary records are the *Purāṇas*. In Vedic and Brāhmaṇa literature the word—"Purāṇa"—is often found in the compound—"itihāsa-purāṇa"—to denote a "tale of olden times." It is found in the *Atharva Veda* as a separate word, but by the side of "itihāsa", and there is perhaps nothing in the older literature to show that the two were distinguished. The *Vedic Index* (i, p. 76) mentions Geldner's conjecture that there existed a single work, "*Itihāsa-Purāṇa*," a collection of old legends of different types; but the supposition is probably inaccurate. In the *Mahābhārata* the word *Purāṇa* is used to indicate "ancient legendary lore" and one passage (i, v, 2) says that the *Purāṇas* contain interesting stories (of the gods) and the history of the earlier generations of sages. Later on, a *Purāṇa* was taken to treat chiefly of five topics :

(1) "The evolution of the universe from the material cause."

(2) Its recreation in each æon.

(3) The genealogies of divinities and sages.

(4) Those of royal families.

(5) An account of groups of great ages.

The existing *Purāṇas* number eighteen—a number known to the last Book of the *Mahābhārata*; but few of these eighteen contain all the five elements referred to. Only seven have the item most important from our point of view—the genealogies of royal families which are very helpful in recreating the political history, particularly the chronology of our period. It is almost certain that the *Purāṇas* as we know them are very different from what they were in earlier times, one evidence for this being the lists of couplets in the various *Purāṇas*. These lists assign 400,000 couplets to the eighteen *Purāṇas*, each individual work varying from about 10,000 to 80,000. But the length of none of the extant *Purāṇas* approximates to that assigned to it—it being generally less through the loss of various parts. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* approximates most closely to the classical definition and has all its five elements; and it has been taken to be the one best preserved of all the *Purāṇas*. But even this has only 7,000 couplets, though the lists assign 23,000 to it.

The *Purāṇas* contain many of the legends narrated in the Great Epic and in some cases the versions of the legends



are certainly influenced by post-*Mahābhārata* literature. Thus the *Padma-Purāṇa* in its story of Śakuntalā follows Kālidāsa's drama rather than the *Mahābhārata*; and in its story of Rāma it is indebted more to the *Raghuvamśa* than to the *Mahābhārata* or the *Rāmāyaṇa*. This would also tend to show that the eighteen *Purāṇas* known to the *Mahābhārata* and the *Harivamśa* must have been rather different from the *Purāṇas* as we know them. Most of these latter, however, repeat some legends in parts of the *Mahābhārata*, legends not always heroic in substance. Thus the *Kūrma* and the *Matsya* bring in the cosmological stories of the epic, and the *Mārkaṇḍeya* discusses how Kṛṣṇa became a man. The *Bhāgavata* narrates in detail the story of Kṛṣṇa, and the *Vāyu* has a good many points in common with the *Mahābhārata* and the *Harivamśa*, while the *Garuḍa* and the *Agni* are practically abstracts of these.

Most of the extant *Purāṇas* are strongly sectarian in tone, meant to glorify either Viṣṇu or Śiva. The ones mentioned above, as also the *Brahma*, the *Brahmavaivarta*, the *Nāradiya*, the *Vāmana* and the *Varāha* are all Viṣṇuite products; while the *Skanda*, the *Śiva*, the *Liṅga* and the *Bhaviṣya* or *Bhaviṣyat* (a name known to Āpastamba) favour Śiva. The same processes which had converted the *Mahābhārata* into a Dharma Sāstra had been at work here also; and what is essential from our point of view has been mostly thrust into the background and what we might be inclined to regard as irrelevances made specially prominent.

Most of the *Purāṇas* are said to be narrated by the reciter of the *Mahābhārata*, Ugraśravas or his father, the sūta Lomahaṛṣaṇa. The narrator of the Viṣṇu *Purāṇa* is said to be Parāśara, the grandson of Vasiṣṭha who may be the sage of the seventh maṇḍala of the *Rgveda*; he narrates it at the court of the Kuru king, Parīkṣit. The other *Purāṇas* are said to be recited a few generations later, generally at the time of the Paurava king, Adhisīmākṛṣṇa, or his contemporaries, the Aikṣvāku Divākara and the Māgadha Senajit. The recitation of most of the *Purāṇas* by a sūta at the court of a prince probably indicates a Kṣatriya origin of the world, though later on the priestly bards must have taken them up. As it is, the historical value of the *Purāṇa* has been generally underestimated in recent years and there has been a tendency

to dismiss them as priestly products of the middle ages. With the publication, however, of Mr. Pargiter's *Dynasties of the Kali Age* (1918), a new development in Paurāṇic studies may be said to have started. This critical examination of the *Purāṇas* may tend to show that however late the *Purāṇas* in their present form may be, they are based on Prākṛta chronicles of much earlier times handed down by oral tradition or otherwise. Though the imagination of an age devoid of the proper historical sense may have confused fact and fiction, it is nevertheless possible to disentangle the two threads and build up a history of the past on the basis of the *Purāṇas*.

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The third source of our information for the Heroic Age is the *Rāmāyaṇa*. This is less important than the other two. It is a work of much greater unity than the *Mahābhārata* and has been treated from quite early times as a *Kāvya* or artificial epic. The *Mahābhārata* professes to be the work of one author; but inconsistencies of the type we have noticed preclude such an idea and it is now generally acknowledged that Vyāsa, the reputed author, is a synonym for the Unknown. The *Rāmāyaṇa*, on the other hand, has an author with a "definite personality" and though there may have been later additions to the original text of Vālmiki, the whole work bears the stamp of one design, nothing like the medley of episodes, theological, philosophical and heroic, which form the Great Epic.

Vālmiki's text has not, of course, remained uncorrupted, as the presence of three distinct recensions shows. The three recensions, the Bengal, the Bombay and the West Indian, differ from one another in important points of the text, about one third of the ślokas of each version being absent from the other two. In its present form, the *Rāmāyaṇa* is divided into seven Books, but the investigations of Professor Jacobi tend to prove that originally it was made up only of five. The work then ended with the sixth Book; the seventh is undoubtedly a late addition and the first Book not only has statements conflicting with the other Books but has a table of contents which neglects the first and the last Books, though after the addition of these Books a new table was prepared and the modern *Rāmāyaṇa* contains both. It has

been further suggested, that the opening of the fifth canto of the first Book originally belonged to the second Book and formed a part of the opening of the whole poem. Thus the earlier work probably consisted only of Books II to VI, though whole cantos may have been added in later times.

It is nevertheless possible to discover a unified kernel of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, while the *Mahābhārata* after all dissections remains a medley of episodes grouped round a central story, the original narration of different parts being attributed to different persons. We need not here go into Hopkins' discussion<sup>1</sup> of the resemblances between the main stories of the two epics—resemblances which are striking enough. But Hopkins' conclusions<sup>2</sup> about the relative antiquity of the two stories are worth noting. He holds : (1) The story of Rāma is older than that of the Pāṇḍavas. (2) The Pāṇḍava story has absorbed an older story, the Bhārata Kathā, the story of the Bhāratas with its root in the episode of the Rājasūya (Bk. ii). (3) This story of the Bhāratas is older than Vālmiki's poem. The main part of our task in investigating the conditions of the Heroic Age of India is to discover as best as we can this old story of the Bhāratas hidden under the different layers of the *Mahābhārata*.

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., *Gt. Epic*, pp. 403 ff., etc.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

## CHAPTER III

### THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE HEROIC AGE OF INDIA

SEVERAL attempts have been made of recent years to fix the chronology of the Kuru-Pāṇḍava battle and the reigns of some of the descendants of the Pāṇḍavas. The main source for such an investigation is the list of the successors of the Pāṇḍavas in the *Purāṇas*. Some of these lists profess to give the exact duration of the reigns of these kings, and of course the most straightforward method is to add up the reigns of kings who are said to have ruled before a definitely historical person like Candragupta, and thence fix the date of the Pāṇḍavas. Candragupta is taken by historians to have begun his reign about 322 B.C. His immediate predecessors, the Nandas, reigned 100 years according to the *Purāṇas*. Next, there is the statement in the *Matsya Purāṇa*<sup>1</sup> that from the coronation of Mahāpadma, the founder of the Nanda dynasty, to the birth of Parīkṣit, Arjuna's grandson, the interval is 1,050 (1,500, according to one reading) years. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (iv, 24, 32) fixes the interval as 1,015 years. If we accept these figures, Parīkṣit was born in 1922 or 1472 or 1437 B.C., and we know Parīkṣit was born shortly after the great battle<sup>2</sup> and his father's death in the battle.

The *Matsya* (ch. 271) gives a list of the successors of Sahadeva, king of Magadha, who was killed in the great battle, and it gives the duration of the reigns of these kings. The first 21 (or 19) are said to reign over 940 years (or 792, according to one reading). The total is, however, given as 1,000 years. The last of these, Ripuñjaya, is said to be slain by Pulaka, who places his son, Pradyota, on the throne. There were five kings in this dynasty; and their reigns added together give from 130 to about 150 years, according to different readings. The *Matsya* (272, 5) gives the total as 52, probably a mistake for 152, while the *Viṣṇu* and the *Bhāgavata* give the total as 138. Nandivardhana, the last of the Pradyotas, is said to be slain by Śiśunāga; and the rule

<sup>1</sup> 273, 36. Cf. *Brahmāṇḍa*, iii, 74, 227. It is 1,115 years according to *Bhāg. Pur.*, xii, ii, 26.

<sup>2</sup> *Mbh.*, xiv, 86, etc.

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of his dynasty extended over 860 years according to the *Matsya*, and 362 according to the *Viṣṇu* and *Vāyu*; but the durations of the individual reigns all added together give only 340 years. The last of the Śiśunāgas is deposed by Mahānanda. So all these years added together would take Sahadeva back to 1800 or 1900 B.C.

But a closer examination of these lists reveals several interesting facts. The reigns of the 19 (or 21) members of Sahadeva's family extend over 792 years, according to the lowest computation, though the *Purāṇas* generally fix the total as 1,000. This gives an average of about 50 years to each member of the dynasty, and that is surely a very highly exaggerated figure as compared with the duration of the reigns of historical kings. Similarly, the 500 years assigned to the 15 members of the next two dynasties seem very high too: and one is inclined to doubt the accuracy of these lists.

The suspicion is strengthened when one sees the repetition of names like Nandivardhana in the Pradyota and Śiśunāga lists, while the latter also mentions Mahānandi, the last king who was killed by Mahāpadmānanda who founded a new dynasty. Now for members of different dynasties to have exactly similar names like this is rather strange; we may suppose that the desire to fill up gaps created new kings in the traditional genealogy, kings whose names were modelled on some of the earliest historical kings we hear of.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover the list of the Śiśunāgas in the *Purāṇas* does not agree with that given by the Ceylonese Chronicle, *Mahāvamsa*. Geiger compares the two lists and we may put them down here.

| <i>Purāṇas.</i>                         | <i>years.</i> | <i>Mahāvamsa.</i>            | <i>years.</i> |
|---|---------------|------------------------------|---------------|
| Śiśunāga . . . .                        | 40            | Bimbisāra . . . .            | 52            |
| Kākavarṇa . . . .                       | 26            | Ajātasattu . . . .           | 32            |
| Kṣemadharmā . . . .                     | 36            | Udayibhadda . . . .          | 16            |
| Kṣemajit . . . .                        | 24            | Anuruddha and Muṇḍa . . . .  | 8             |
| Vindhyasena (Bimbisāra) . . . .         | 28            | Nāgadasaka . . . .           | 24            |
| [Kāṇvāyana and Bhūmi-<br>mitra] . . . . | 23            | Susunāga . . . .             | 18            |
| Ajātasattu . . . .                      | 27            | Kālāsoka . . . .             | 28            |
| Darśaka (or Vamśaka) . . . .            | 24            | Ten sons of Kālāsoka . . . . | 22            |
| Udayi . . . .                           | 33            | Nine Nandas . . . .          | 22            |
| Nandivardhana . . . .                   | 40            |                              |               |
| Mahānandi . . . .                       | 43            |                              |               |
| Mahāpadmānanda, etc. . . .              | 100           |                              |               |

<sup>1</sup> For another explanation of this similarity of names, see Mr. Jayaswal's article in the *Journal of the Behar and Orissa Research Society*, September, 1915.

Geiger discussed these differences<sup>1</sup> and noted not only the longer period assigned by the Paurāṇic tradition but also the difference in the order of the kings. Jacobi<sup>2</sup> and Geiger agree in identifying Kālāsoka and Kākavarṇa. But the *Purāṇas* place Kākavarṇa and his father at the head of the list, while the *Mahāvamśa* ranges them after Bimbisāra and Ajātasattu and some others. There are other minor differences too. In these matters the Burmese tradition and the Nepalese list of the *Asokavadana* mainly agree with the *Mahāvamśa* as against the *Purāṇas*. Geiger is therefore inclined to rely more on the *Mahāvamśa* list.

Finally the *Purāṇas* place Pradyota at the head of the line that destroyed Sahadeva's dynasty, and Bimbisāra is separated from him by eight reigns. According to Buddhist sources, however, the three great contemporaries of Bimbisāra were Pajjota (Pradyota) of Avanti, Pasenadi (Prasenajit) of Kosala and Udena (Udayana) of Vamśa (Vatsa). Bhāsa's *Soapna Vāsavadattā* and *Pratijñā-Yaugamdhārayaṇa* tell the story of Udayana's marriage with and love for Vāsavadattā, the daughter of Pradyota who was at first a great enemy of Udayana's. The *Majjhima Nikāya* (iii, 7) speaks of Ajātasattu anticipating an attack of Pajjota, and it has been supposed<sup>3</sup> that this Pajjota, the enemy of the Magadha king, is no other than the Pradyota of the *Purāṇas*. If so, the *Purāṇa* list after Ripuñjaya must be wholly rejected; and we must take Bimbisāra as founding a new dynasty at the expense of an old one, while Pradyota too had ambitions about the kingdom and probably made more than one inroad on it.

Such attempts at reconstruction must necessarily be conjectural; but what remains certain is, that the period intervening between Sahadeva and Candra Gupta has been very much exaggerated by the *Purāṇas*. Even the 100 years assigned to Mahāpadma and his sons is rather improbable, and Mr. Pargiter in his *Ancient Indian Tradition* (pp. 179 ff.) was struck by the inordinate

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to *Mahāv.* (Trans. Pali Text Soc.), pp. xliv ff.

<sup>2</sup> Introduction to *Kālpasūtra*.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. *The Cambridge History of India* (referred to hereafter as *C.H.I.*), i, pp. 310-11; and by Professor Bhandarkar: *Carmichael Lectures*, 1918, pp. 68 ff. On p. 72 there is an argument for regarding Bimbisāra as a predecessor of Śiśunāga.

length of the reigns. So he took his stand on the Purāṇic statement about the dynasties contemporary with the Magadha one. The *Matsya* (272, 14 ff.) mentions the number of kings of other lines contemporary with the Magadha one from Senajit to Mahāpadma. It says : " There will be 24 Ikṣvāku kings, 27 Pāṇcālas, 24 of Kāśī, 28 Haihayas, 32 Kalingas, 25 Āśmakas, 36 Kauravas, 28 Maithilas, 23 Śūrasenas and 20 Vitihotra kings.<sup>1</sup> All these kings will endure the same time and will be contemporaries." That these are contemporaries from the time of Senajit onwards and not from Sahadeva is evident from the use of the future tense ; for the *Purāṇas* with the exception of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* profess to have been composed at the time of Senajit, seventh in the line after Sahadeva, and his contemporaries were the Paurava Adhisimākṛṣṇa and the Aikṣvāku Divākara. The kings who came after are named in the form of a prophecy. Hence our initial point is the reign of these kings and the final point is the extermination of an older Magadha line by Mahāpadma. This latter event Mr. Pargiter places in 382 B.C., 60 years before Candragupta's accession.

For the intervening period we have in the *Matsya* (272, 14) list 257 kings in ten kingdoms, that is an average of about 26 in each. Now there must have been reigns of much greater length than others ; and we find that the largest average of reigns must have been among the Vitihotras who had only 20 in the period, while the shortest was among the Kalingas who had 32. So Mr. Pargiter argues : 20 long reigns = 32 short reigns = 26 medium reigns and he obtains the proportion : longest average : shortest : medium : 26 :  $16\frac{1}{2}$  : 20. From an examination of various records he had found that the longest average was about 24 and the shortest about 12 years, while the average of all kings was 19 years. Hence assigning 18 years to an average reign, he gets  $26 \times 18 = 468$  years and this enables him to place Adhisimākṛṣṇa, etc., in  $468 + 382$ , i.e., in 850 B.C. In the Magadha line, the average would work out at about  $14\frac{1}{2}$  years per reign and the shortness may be justified by the violence which too often led to the overthrow of the kings.<sup>2</sup> Between the

<sup>1</sup> We cannot be certain about these figures owing to the corruption of the text. See *C.H.I.*, p. 315.

<sup>2</sup> We may compare a passage not mentioned by Pargiter : *Mahāv.*, iv, 1-8.

kings in whose reigns the *Purāṇas* are taken to be composed and the great battle of the *Mahābhārata*, there were 4<sup>1</sup> kings in the Paurava line, 4 in the Aikṣvāku line (*Matsya*, 271) and 6 in the Bārhadratha (Magadha) line. This period we may take to be about 100 years and that would give us about 950 B.C. as the date of the great battle.

This is Mr. Pargiter's conclusion about the date and it is based on the probable lengths of reigns computed from the data of some historical dynasties. Such a conclusion is always problematic and open to criticism; but the method of argument seems much more convincing than taking as correct the period of the reigns given in the *Purāṇas*. Tradition may very well transmit genealogical lists of names from generation to generation; and the shorter the list is the greater is the chance of its accuracy. When the list is very long, that is, when the genealogy is extended very far back, the tradition has to be examined very carefully, for the order of kings is easily liable to be changed. Omission of names and substitution too are probable; and it is only through a comparison of various readings and various texts—a number of genealogies if possible—that we can arrive at a reasonable estimate of the line of kings. When however the lists profess to give the duration of reigns, they are surely far less reliable; for though the audience of a reciter of *vanśas* (genealogies) is interested in an enumeration of ancestors and past kings, the lengths of the reigns do not matter, and the reciter does not care to remember them accurately. It is certainly more difficult to remember these figures than to memorize the names of kings.

One cannot, however, rely very much on an argument from the probable lengths of reigns, and one should try to verify or correct it from other sources. I fancy we have such materials in the genealogies of the Pauravas and the Aikṣvākus. Let us take the former from *Matsya*, 50: Arjuna — Abhimanyu — Parīkṣit — Janamejaya — Śatānika — Aśvamedhadatta<sup>2</sup> — Adhisomakṛṣṇa (or Adhisimākṛṣṇa) — Vivakṣu (or Nicakṣu) — Bhuri (or Uṣṇa) — Citraratha — Śudrava (Śucidratha) — Vṛṣṇimat

<sup>1</sup> Not perhaps 5, as Pargiter thinks, for Abhimanya should not be included.

<sup>2</sup> This name has been taken by some as qualifying Adhisimākṛṣṇa in the sense "gained through the performance of Aśvamedha sacrifice".



—Suṣeṇa — Sunītha (Ruca) — Nṛeakṣu — Sukhībala — Pariplava — Sutapā (or Sunaya) — Medhāvin — Purañjaya (or Nṛpañjaya) — Urva — Tigmatman — Brhadratha — Vasudāman — Śatānika — Udayana.

Now Udayana is a historic figure and figures both in Buddhist and Sanskrit records, as has been already pointed out. He was a contemporary of the Buddha, just as Bimbisāra, Prasenajit and Pradyota were.<sup>1</sup> For Bimbisāra and the Buddha, the *Cambridge History* (p. 312) accepts the chronology as determined by Geiger in the "Introduction to the Translation of the Mahāvamsa" (p. xlv), where Bimbisāra is taken to reign from 543 B.C. to 491 B.C. The Buddha attained nibbāna (nirvāṇa) in the eighth year of the reign of Ajātaśatru, Bimbisāra's son, i.e., in 483 B.C. Udayana survived the Buddha,<sup>2</sup> but if the stories of Bhāsa and some Buddhist records are correct, he must have reigned a fairly long time and we may regard him as born somewhere about 530 B.C. Now the genealogy we have mentioned places 23 (or 24) generations<sup>3</sup> between Udayana and Abhimanyu who was killed in the great battle.

In computing the length of a generation we are not quite on so unsure a ground as the average lengths of reigns. In basing calculations on European genealogies, generally 33 years are allowed for a generation. In India various factors would contribute to a shorter period. Moreover, although here in each case a successor is said to be the son of his predecessor, we cannot always be sure about it. In the inheritance of a kingdom the rule of primogeniture was not always observed; and if a king died leaving a young son, the probabilities were that he would be supplanted by an uncle or some such person. In such a case, the reciter would not always remember the exact relationship of predecessor and successor but would put the latter down as the son of the former. Keeping in mind these considerations we may perhaps assign 25 years to a generation.

Nevertheless, it would be rather unsafe to draw any definite conclusions merely from one genealogy. Fortunately

<sup>1</sup> C.H.I. (pp. 187-8), mentions the Buddhist sources, U'dāna, Saṃyutta, etc.

<sup>2</sup> *Peta-vatthu commentary*, 140, mentioned in C.H.I., p. 187.

<sup>3</sup> That it is generations and not simply successions is evident from the constant use of the fifth case (e.g. Śvetidrathas Citrarathād) or the statement that the successor was the predecessor's son.

we have at least two others. One is that of the Ikṣvākus and runs as follows : Br̥hadbala — (Br̥hatkṣaya) — Urukṣaya — Vatsadroha (Vatsavyūha) — Prativyoma — Divākara — Sahadeva — Dhruvāśva (or Br̥hadaśva) — Bhāvya (Bhānuratha or Bhāvyaratha) — Pratipāśva — Supratipa — Marudeva — Sunakṣatra — Kinnarāśva — Antarikṣa — Suṣeṇa — Sumitra (or Amitrajit) — Br̥hadrāja — Dharmin — Kṛtañjaya — Raṇañjaya — Sañjaya — [Śākya — Śuddhodana — Siddhārtha — Puṣkala (Rāhula)] — Prasenajit.

We have already pointed out that Prasenajit (or Pasnadi in Buddhist tradition) was a contemporary of the Buddha<sup>1</sup>; and from the Saṃyutta Nikāya (i, 79 ff.) we hear of his fights against Ajātasattu and their ultimate reconciliation. He is evidently of the same generation as Bimbisāra and was fairly old when Ajātasattu was reigning. According to the Purāṇa genealogy there are 25 kings between Br̥hadbala who fought in the great war and Prasenajit. But there are at least four names in the list which have been introduced in later times; and Śākya, the eponymous hero of Gautama Buddha's line, Buddha's father, himself and his son, have been put into the Kośala (Kosala) list.<sup>2</sup> This may have been due merely to the desire on the part of the Kośala bards "to magnify the lineage of their lord"; but another reason may be suggested. Prasenajit was dethroned by his son, Viṣṇudabha; and one of the first things the latter did was to invade the Śākya (Śākya) land and slaughter as many of the people as possible.<sup>3</sup> We cannot here go into the motives of the invasion; but as has been pointed out by Dr. Rhys Davids, the fact of the annihilation of the clan is scarcely open to doubt.<sup>4</sup> Viṣṇudabha is not mentioned in the *Purāṇas* which give Kṣudraka as Prasenajit's successor. But if Viṣṇudabha annexed the Śākya (Śākya) land, it would be possible for his successors ruling in that territory to claim descent from the old ruling family. We may compare the case of Attila, who came to be associated with Dietrich (perhaps Theodric the Ostrogoth) in Germanic heroic legend,

<sup>1</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, ii, 124.

<sup>2</sup> See *C.H.I.*, p. 308.

<sup>3</sup> *Mahāvamsa*, viii, 18, and note (p. 63 of P.T.S. Trans.).

<sup>4</sup> See *Buddhist India* (1911 edn.), pp. 11 ff., and *C.H.I.*, p. 182.

as also of Hildebrand, the Teutonic hero, who was regarded as a Hun warrior.<sup>1</sup>

In any case we have to exclude the four names from our genealogy. This leaves us 21 kings between the great battle and Prasenajit. We must note that the successor is not always said to be the son of the predecessor, but as we have already made allowances for the contingency by taking only 25 years for a generation, we may, in the absence of any statement to the contrary, take the kings as representing successive generations. So in the Aikṣvāku genealogy we have 22 generations from the great battle, while the Paurava one has about 24 for the same period.

Finally we may again take up the Magadha genealogy and see if that can give us any data. In that genealogy we have, according to Mr. Pargiter's text of the *Matsya*, 271, 22 kings in the first part after Sahadeva, who was killed in the great battle. The list is: Sahadeva — Somādhi — Śrutaśravas — Apratipin (or Ayutāyus) — Niramitra — Sukṣatra (or Surakṣa) — Brhatkarman — Senājit — Śrutañjaya — Vibhu — Śuci — Kṣema — Suvrata — Sunetra — Nirvṛti — Trinetra — Dr̥ghadasena (Dyumnatsena) — Mahānetra — Sucala (or Acala) — Sunetra — Satyajit — Viśvajit — Ripuñjaya. The difficulty comes in the next part of the genealogy. First, there is the statement in the *Purāṇas* that Pulaka slew his master, Ripuñjaya, and installed his son, Pradyota or Bālaka, as king; and after four (or five) kings of this dynasty Śiśunāga's line came in. Here I think one can agree with Professor Rapson in considering this as history distorted.<sup>2</sup> Independent lists have probably been placed in a false sequence; and the great Pradyota of Avanti, a contemporary of Bimbisāra, who was a fierce antagonist of the Magadha kings,<sup>3</sup> is placed some generations earlier and made to be a destroyer of an old Magadha line. There is also the statement in the *Matsya* referred to in the *Cambridge History* (p. 311) which is said to imply the same thing. So I think we can take the line of Ripuñjaya to have been succeeded by that of Bimbisāra;

<sup>1</sup> "pá kom enn hári Hildebrandr Hunakappi," quoted by Olrik in *The Heroic Legends of Denmark* (p. 3 of Hollander's trans.), from a lay of the cycle of the Danish royal race of the Sǫlings.

<sup>2</sup> *C.H.I.*, p. 310.

<sup>3</sup> *Majjhima Nik.*, iii, 7.

and here we have already shown that there are good grounds for regarding Bimbisāra as the founder of the line and Śīśunāga as one of his successors. Following the line of argument used in the case of the last genealogy, we may regard Bimbisāra as separated from the time of the great battle by twenty-one generations.

Now there does not seem very much of a discrepancy between the number of generations in the three genealogies. The three contemporaries, Bimbisāra, Prasenajit, and Udayana, are regarded as in the twenty-second, twenty-third, and twenty-fourth generation respectively after the great battle. And if we regard them as reigning about 500 B.C. we may put back the age of the great battle another 575 ( $23 \times 25$ ) years and take the eleventh century as approximately our period.

\* \* \*

Another way of attempting to fix the period of our heroes is to see if they are mentioned anywhere in the oldest Sanskrit Literature—in the Vedas or the Brāhmaṇas.<sup>1</sup> The first king we may take up is Janamejaya. The *Vedic Index* (i, 273) points out that he was a Pārikṣita famous towards the end of the Brāhmaṇa period.<sup>2</sup> The *Śatapatha* (xiii, 5, 4, 18) mentions him as a performer of the Aśvamedha. There is a discrepancy between the evidence of the *Śatapatha* and *Aitareya* about his horse-sacrifice, for the former mentions the priest as Indrota Daivāpi and the latter as Tura Kāvaseya. His brothers Ugrasena, Bhīmasena, and Śrutasena are said to have participated in the horse-sacrifice. Now in the epic there is a king, Janamejaya, the son of Parikṣit and great-grandson of Arjuna, in whose presence the *Mahābhārata* is said to have been recited. There are one or two other Janamejayas, ancestors of the main heroes of the epic; and it is disputable which of the three Janamejayas is referred to in the Brāhmaṇas. The epic (i, 3, 1) mentions that the later Janamejaya had three brothers, Śrutasena, Ugrasena, and Bhīmasena; and that these three were attending a horse-sacrifice along with Janamejaya.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pargiter considers as futile the effort to rescue history from priestly literature.

<sup>2</sup> Śat. Brā., xiii, 5, 4, 1; Ait. Brā., vii, 34, etc.; viii, 11, 21.

<sup>3</sup> Pargiter regards this as an absurd fable and would not put any reliance on it.

As regards the other and earlier Janamejayas, the epic (i, 94) mentions that Kuru had five sons including Avikṣit and Janamejaya. Avikṣit had eight sons, Parikṣit and seven others. "In the race of these were born seven mighty charioteers with Janamejaya as their head. And unto Parikṣit were born sons . . . Kakṣasena, Ugrasena, Citrasena, Indrasena, Suśeṇa and Bhīmasena." It will be noticed that two of the sons of Parikṣit (the earlier one) bear the same names as two brothers of the Brāhmaṇic Janamejaya. But there the resemblance ends, for Janamejaya is not described as the son of Parikṣit; hence these are not his brothers. Therefore, this evidence would point to the identification of the great-grandson of Arjuna with the Brāhmaṇic Janamejaya. Further, as has been pointed out by Mr. Ray Chowdury,<sup>1</sup> the Brāhmaṇic Janamejaya apparently performed *two* horse-sacrifices. This is evident from the mention of two priests for such and the *Matsya Purāṇa* (50, 63-4) speaking about Janamejaya, the great-grandson of Arjuna, says that he performed *two* horse-sacrifices. So there are at least some grounds for identifying him with the king mentioned in the *Brāhmaṇas*.

The date of these *Brāhmaṇas* is taken to be in the neighbourhood of the year 700 B.C.<sup>2</sup> This would mean that Janamejaya, famous in tradition, must have reigned at least a hundred years before, very possibly more; and this would give a date for the great battle not very far away from what we had arrived at from other considerations.

Moreover, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (iii, 8, 1) seems to indicate that the descendants of Parikṣit had vanished and the family had lost all power; and as the *Upaniṣads* are placed round about 600 B.C.,<sup>3</sup> this too would agree very well with our hypothesis. A king Parikṣit is mentioned in the *Atharva Veda* as ruling in Kuru-land, and in his kingdom peace and prosperity abound. If, as has been sometimes argued,<sup>4</sup> this Parikṣit is the same as the grandson of Arjuna, the age of the *Pāṇḍavas* might seem to be a little farther back than we have supposed. But the *Vedic Index* (i, 494) points out that the passage in the *Atharva Veda*

<sup>1</sup> *Journal of Dept. of Letters*, Cal. ix.

<sup>2</sup> See C.H.I., p. 697. Cf. pp. 147 ff.

<sup>3</sup> See C.H.I., p. 697. Cf. pp. 147 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Ray Chowdury in *Journal of Letters*, Calcutta.

is late and hence probably not earlier than 800 B.C.,<sup>1</sup> and this would fit in very well with our supposition.

A Dhṛtarāṣṭra Vaicitravīrya is mentioned in the *Kāṭhaka Saṃhitā*, which probably dates from the period of the *Brāhmaṇas*, and as Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the father of the Kuru princes in the *Mahābhārata*, is the son of Vicitravīrya, one is tempted to identify the two. But Keith<sup>2</sup> doubts if the *Saṃhitā* Dhṛtarāṣṭra is a Kuru prince at all; and he is inclined to identify him with Dhṛtarāṣṭra of Kāśī, mentioned in the *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa*. In any case, even if we could identify him with the prince of the epic, it would not advance matters very much.

Another set of names which might give us some help is of Devāpi, Śāntanu, and Vāhlika (Bāhlika). In the epic (i, 94, and v, 149) the great-grandfather of the Kurus and the Pāṇḍus is Śāntanu, and his two brothers are Devāpi and Vāhlika, they being sons of Pratipa. Devāpi was the eldest son, but he was prevented from succeeding to the throne either through religious zeal (*Mbh.* i, 94) or through having a skin disease (*Mbh.* v, 149) and Śāntanu was installed as king. The history is given by Yaska in the *Nirukta*, a text of about 500 B.C.,<sup>3</sup> where it is further stated that, in consequence of Śāntanu's improper deed, no rain fell for twelve years, and he asked Devāpi to become king. The latter would not; but instead performed for the king a sacrifice to produce rain. Now the *Rg-Veda* (x, 98) states that Devāpi Ārṣṭiṣeṇa obtained (as priest) rain for Śāntanu (a king).<sup>4</sup> It must be noticed that there is no mention of brotherhood between the men nor that Devāpi was a Kṣatriya. Sieg, however, held<sup>5</sup> that the persons in the *Rg-Veda* are the same as those of *Nirukta* (and the epic). Devāpi is associated with an Ārṣṭiṣeṇa in the epic (ix, 40-1); and this Devāpi is certainly Śāntanu's brother. This might lead us to suppose that the *Rg-Veda* persons are the epic ones; and the fact that the *Śatapatha* (xii, 9, 3, 3) mentions a Vāhlika Prāṭpiya might support this idea. This view is combated by Keith<sup>6</sup> and upheld by Pargiter<sup>7</sup>; and the

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 4 ff.

<sup>2</sup> C.H.I., p. 119. Also *Ved. Ind.*, i, 408.

<sup>3</sup> C.H.I., p. 117.

<sup>4</sup> *Ved. Ind.*, ii, 858.

<sup>5</sup> *Die Sagenstoffe des Rg-Veda*: referred to in *Ved. Ind.*, ii, 858.

<sup>6</sup> *Ved. Ind.*, ii, 64, and i, 878.

<sup>7</sup> *Ancient Indian Tradition*, pp. 165, 252, etc.

latter's arguments are at least worth considering. However, even if this view is accepted that need not affect our hypothetical chronology, for the hymn in question is one in the *tenth* book of the *R̥g-Veda* and the persons are those of three or four generations above the main figures of the epic.

Next we come to figures of epic stories other than the main one—stories like those of Yayāti, Śakuntalā and others. The epic professes to place these stories in the far past. If it is difficult to fix the chronology of the Kuru-Pāṇḍava war, it must be much more so to do so for these stories. We must notice, however, that Yayāti is mentioned twice in the *R̥g-Veda* (i, 31, 17; and x, 63, 1), once as an ancient sacrificer and once as Nāhuṣya. Now this last is interesting, as in the epic (i, 75, etc.), Yayāti is the son of Nahuṣa. The word Nahuṣa occurs several times in the *R̥g-Veda* and in one passage (viii, 46, 27) seems to be the name of a man.

The story of Śakuntalā tells us of Bharata, the son of Duṣmanta and Śakuntalā. The *Śat. Brāhm.* (xiii, 5, 4) mentions Bharata Dauṣṇanti as a king, an Aśvamedha-sacrificer, and the *Ait. Brāhm.* mentions the same person as being crowned by Dīrghatamas Māmateya, who also figures in the epic (i, 104). The story of Nala is not definitely located by the epic in the distant past, but there is nothing to indicate when the characters lived. One Bhīma Vaidarbha (a prince of Vidarbha) is mentioned in the *Ait. Brāhm.* (vii, 34), and we may try to connect him with Bhīma, the king of Vidarbha in the Nalopākhyāna. The *Śatapatha* (ii, 3, 2, 1-2) mentions a Naḍa Naiṣidha (Naiṣadha) who may or may not be the hero of this story. The *Śatapatha* (iv, 1, 5, 1 ff.) gives the story of Cyavana in the same form as it is given in the epic (iii, 122 ff.), but the story was known to the *R̥g-Veda* too.<sup>1</sup> The references to the Yadus, Anus, Turvasas, Druhyus, and Purus in the *R̥g-Veda* (i, 108, 8) would not help us very much; as though the five sons of Yayāti are said in the epic (i, 75, etc.) to give their names to these five tribes, it is generally held that they are eponymous heroes, invented for the purpose.

Finally we must point out that the Kurus, as such, are not mentioned in the *R̥g-Veda*; but Oldenburg may be

<sup>1</sup> i, 116, 118; v, 74, etc.

right when he supposes<sup>1</sup> the Kurus were known by some other name in the R̥g-Vedic times. One Kuruśravaṇa is described (in *R.V.* x, 33) as a descendant of Trasadasyu, a Puru king. There is great controversy as to whether Vedic literature knows of an enmity between the Kurus and the Pāṇcālas. Keith holds<sup>2</sup> that the enmity is not known to the Vedic literature; while Weber and Grierson support the opposite view.<sup>3</sup> If we could show that the enmity is to be traced back to the Vedic literature, it might be of some help in fixing the chronology. As to how far some of the stories in the first book of the epic may be placed in the distant past, we are not yet in a position to say anything definite. One admires Mr. Pargiter's elaborate reconstruction of the past; but one is inclined to feel shy of accepting *in toto* a list of ninety-five generations (or successions) before the great battle and relying on them to build the history of India from about 2000 B.C. to 1000 B.C.; for there is always the danger that lists of names contemporary with one another may have been placed in succession and genealogies of unmanageable and aristocratic length framed from them.

In fixing this chronology, we have, then, to rely mainly on two kinds of evidence: (1) The evidence of genealogies, chiefly from the *Purāṇas* and (2) The mention of heroic figures in Vedic and Brāhmaṇa literature. We have not, as in the case of the Teutonic Heroic Age, historical records almost contemporary with the events, records which support and correct the stories<sup>4</sup> of heroic poems. The term "heroic", of course, may be applied to pieces like the *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál*, just as much as to Beowulf or the *Hildebrandslied*; but generally the "Teutonic Heroic Age" refers to the period from the time of Eormenric, who died about 375, to that of Alboin, who died about 572. This is the period covered by common traditions of the various Teutonic peoples, traditions which are embedded in the heroic poems that have survived. For this period we can rely on Ammianus Marcellinus, on Jordanes' *History of the Goths*, on the *History of the Franks* by Gregory of Tours,

<sup>1</sup> *Buddha*, 403 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *JRAS*, 1908, 831-6; 1138-42. Also *Ved. Ind.*, i, 166.

<sup>3</sup> *Indian Literature*, 114; *JRAS*, 1908, 602-7, 837-44.

<sup>4</sup> See Chadwick's *Heroic Age*, ch. ii.



the *History of the Lombards* by Paulus Diaconus, and the letters of Cassiodorus, not to mention scraps of information contained in various chronicles, annals, and laws.

We have no such records for the period we are investigating, and hence absolutely certain evidence of historicity is absent. Nor have we the evidence of archæology for our support, evidence of the type Schliemann and Dörpfeld brought to bear on the Homeric story. The sites of ancient Indian heroic stories have yet to be thoroughly excavated, and so long as that is not done we have to rely on evidence similar to that of Eratosthenes, whose conclusions were based on the lengths of reigns ascribed to the kings of Sparta. The figures for the earlier reigns here have been shown to be greatly <sup>1</sup> exaggerated; and in the case of the Indian evidence too—that of the *Purāṇas*—we have to notice a similar thing.

In the case of the Greek <sup>2</sup> Heroic Age greater reliance has been placed on the genealogies given by Herodotus,<sup>3</sup> where two historic figures, Leonidas and Leotychidas, are traced back to Eurysthenes and Prokles respectively. Then there is the evidence of Pausanias (i, 11) and other genealogies; and from these, the period of the Heroic Age is sought to be fixed. We have attempted to follow a similar method and believe that some sort of a working date can be arrived at from these.

<sup>1</sup> See *H.A.*, pp. 179 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>3</sup> vii, 204; viii, 131.

## NOTE

### POLYNESIAN GENEALOGIES

A method very similar to that adopted in this chapter has been used in computing dates in Polynesian history. Here one has to start with the present day and attempt to go back as far as possible on the basis of the genealogies. There are two groups of genealogies, one dealing with comparatively modern times and the other taking us back to the misty past. To take the former first, we may look at four lists starting from a Hua or Whiro and bringing us down to the present day. The Hawaïi genealogy starting from Hua mentions twenty-five generations, the Raiatea from Hiro or Whiro mentions twenty-five, the Rarotonga from Iro or Whiro twenty-six, and the New Zealand from Whiro and Hua twenty-six. There is thus a uniformity in the number of generations mentioned, and the lists may be used for historical purposes. Fornander in his *Polynesian Races* adopted the European standard of about thirty years. But Mr. S. P. Smith in his *Hawaiki* says that the consensus of opinion is for twenty-five. Counting on the latter basis we may place Whiro and Hua about 1250 or 1275. Proceeding farther back we find the generations between Te Ngaitaitoariki and Tangiia to be sixty-six in one list, sixty-nine in another, and seventy-one in several others. The numbers are not widely divergent here also; so we may perhaps go back to about 475 B.C. and assign dates to important epochs of Polynesian History.

## CHAPTER IV

### EARLY INDIAN MINSTRELSY AND HEROIC POETRY

THE question of the date of the *Mahābhārata* in its present form has been discussed at length by various critics, and perhaps the most important contribution is that of Professor Hopkins.<sup>1</sup> He has collected all the external evidence on the matter; and he points out that the *Mahābhārata* "is not recognized in any Sanskrit literary work till after the end of the Brāhmaṇa period and only in the latest Sūtras, where it is an evident intrusion into the text". Thus the Sāṃkhyāyana has a list of Sumantu, Jaimini, etc., with no mention of the epic. But the *Āśvalāyana* inserts the *Bhārata* and the *Mahābhārata* in the same list, while the *Śāmbarya* does not notice the *Bhārata* and recognizes only the *Mahābhārata*. Patañjali recognizes a Pāṇḍava epic in verse and Pāṇini mentions some of the heroes and also knows the name *Mahābhārata*. In none of these cases, however, can we be sure that the epic in its present form was known to the authors.

The internal evidence is more difficult to discuss; yet two or three important facts must be noticed. Thus the Roman denarius is known to the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Harivaṃśa* is known to the first and the last book. These must therefore have come to their present form after the introduction of Roman coins (A.D. 100–200). Again, there seems to be sufficient evidence to show that at least portions of the present *Mahābhārata* must have been composed after the Greek invasion.<sup>2</sup> Another point worth noticing is the absence of any mention of copper-plate grants in the epic. Gifts to priests were safeguarded by such grants in the second or third century A.D., and they are mentioned in the law books of Viṣṇu, Nārada, and Yājñavalka, but not before. Now in the epic, gifts of land to priests are highly praised; but of copper-plate grants there is no mention at all.

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., *Gt. Epic of India*, ch. vi.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., *Gt. Epic*, pp. 292–3.

A consideration of matters like these led Hopkins to the following conclusions about the date of the epic. There is no evidence of an epic before about 400 B.C. A Mahābhārata tale with Pāṇḍava heroes and Kṛṣṇa as a demi-god probably existed by about 200 B.C. The epic was re-made with Kṛṣṇa as "All-god" and the addition of Paurāṇic material and didactic discourse from 200 B.C. to A.D. 200. But the last book, the introduction to the first book and the thirteenth book in its present form must have been added about A.D. 200-400.

If then the epic cannot be dated back beyond 400 B.C., while there is good ground for supposing that the heroes belonged to a period about 600 years further back, the question naturally arises how the accounts of the deeds of the heroes can have been carried on during this intervening period. The problem is how and when the heroic tradition was first treated by poets, as well as in what form it was preserved during the 600 years. For the solution of this problem it may be useful first to study how heroic tradition has been preserved in other countries.

The Teutonic evidence is quite clear on the point.<sup>1</sup> Long before the Teutonic Heroic Age Tacitus said<sup>2</sup> that the Germani possessed ancient songs and he added that these were their only means of preserving an historical record. In the *Annals* (ii, 88) he refers to the "heroic character" of these songs, saying how Arminius was still in his time a subject of such songs. Jordanes<sup>3</sup> says that the Goths celebrated the deeds of their great heroes in poetry and it is probable that some of the legends narrated by him were derived from such poetry. Very valuable evidence is supplied by Priscus' account of his visit to Attila's court where he heard the recitation of poems recounting Attila's victories and his valiant deeds of war. Attila was probably following the Gothic custom; and we hear of Gothic court minstrels from the letters of Cassiodorus and Sidonius Apollinaris.<sup>4</sup> The poems also of Sidonius<sup>5</sup> and of Venantius Fortunatus<sup>6</sup> give evidence of Teutonic minstrelsy; while

<sup>1</sup> Chadwick's *Heroic Age*, ch. v, etc.

<sup>2</sup> *Germania*, 2-3.

<sup>3</sup> *Getica*, 5 (Mierow's trans.).

<sup>4</sup> Chadwick mentions Cassiodorus' *Variarum*, ii, 40 ff., and Sidonius' *Epistles*, ii, 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Carm.*, 12, translated by Hodgkin in *Italy and her Invaders*, vol. ii, p. 363.

<sup>6</sup> *Carm.*, vii, 8, 61, referred to by Chadwick, *II.A.*, p. 85.

Procopius (Vand. ii, 6) speaks of a Vandal king desirous of singing the story of his misfortunes to the accompaniment of the harp.

The Anglo-Saxon poems supply us with good evidence on the matter. Deor says that he was the "scop" or court bard of the Heodeningas and that his place has been usurped by Heorrenda, another skilful poet. In Beowulf we have several mentions of the "scop",<sup>1</sup> whose business seems to be singing or recitation, to the accompaniment of the harp. It is Hrothgar's "scop" who recites the story of Finn and Hengist; but other people at the court know the art of minstrelsy. Thus a "king's thegn" composes an account of Beowulf's Grendel-adventure almost immediately after the event, while the king himself can lay "his hands on the joyous harp" and recite "stories of old time". Widsith is a wandering minstrel; he is attached to one particular king, but moves on from one royal court to another. He is a prominent man in the court, one who offers presents to his lord and is probably entrusted with the care of a queen or princess on her way to a foreign court.

There seem to have been minstrels of a different type too, minstrels who catered not for royalty but for the people. We hear of them in the seventh or eighth century—in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, for example. Bede<sup>2</sup> says that at village gatherings every one had to take his turn at the harp and sing. William of Malmesbury tells<sup>3</sup> the story of Aldhelm who used to stand on a bridge and sing to people like a professional minstrel. Alcuin in a letter to Hygebold written in 797 refers to the tendency of priests to listen to a harpist singing the poems of the heathens; poems about Ingeld, for example. From the Life of St. Liudger we hear of a blind Frisian minstrel, Bernlef, who "was greatly loved by his neighbours because of his geniality and his skill in reciting to the accompaniment of the harp stories of the deeds of the ancients and the wars of kings".

We have then several stages in the history of Teutonic heroic poetry. In the first stage we have the poems of the Heroic Age itself, poems actually composed at the courts of the heroes. Of this type is the account of Beowulf's

<sup>1</sup> Lines 96, 1066, etc.

<sup>2</sup> *Hist. Ec.*, iv, 24.

<sup>3</sup> *Gesta Pontif.*, v, § 190, mentioned in Chadwick's *H.A.*, p. 80.

adventure (ll. 867 ff.) or the song sung before Attila. Deor and Widsith must have sung similar songs of their master's prowess; and the princes themselves sometimes sang of their adventures. So did Hrothgar as well as Gelimer; and Hrethel's dirge over his son may be placed in the same class.

For a time, even after the death of the hero, new songs could have been made about him, songs dealing with adventures not yet celebrated by bards. But gradually these individual songs were brought together; and this led to the composition of more ambitious works. This is the second stage of heroic poetry when the older court-poems give place to epic poems based upon them. Beowulf is clearly a product of this stage; and the complete poems on Finn and Waldhere were most probably of this type. Here for a time the minstrels reciting the epics would have some freedom. If the hearers were not very familiar with the works, the reciters could introduce additions and alterations; but with a courtly audience the treatment is fixed and the hands of the trained minstrel are tied. Attempts have been made to distinguish between poems like Beowulf and Waldhere on the one hand and Finn and Hildebrandslied on the other; but the difference between the two is probably one of minor importance—being more a question of length than anything else.

In the third stage we have the popular versions of the old heroic stories; and these tend to approximate to the type of the ballad. The main events and characters of the old stories are retained; but details and minor characters are lost sight of and there is a tendency to amalgamate stories formerly unconnected. Bernlef's poems were probably of this type; but unfortunately none of these has survived. Many of the mediæval German poems on Dietrich, poems like Virginal, Sigenot, and Laurin, were probably based on such popular products; perhaps Thithrek's Saga and Saxo's History owe a good deal to such compositions.

There is another stage in the history of Teutonic heroic poetry—a stage to which belong the *Nibelungenlied* and *Kudrun*, poems "composed at a time when heroic subjects had again come into favour with the higher classes". But with this stage we have little to do here.

In the history of Greek heroic poetry we find parallels to all these four stages. For the first we may take the song of Demodokos in Alkinoos' court (*Odys.*, viii). He sang of the quarrel between Odysseus and Achilles in the presence of the former; and he played on the lyre in accompaniment to his song. Princely heroes practised the art of the minstrel; and the skill of Paris (*Il.*, iii) and Achilles (*Il.*, ix) parallels that of Hrothgar and Gelimer. When Odysseus and Aias visited Achilles, he was delighting his soul and singing the glories of heroes; and he was probably singing the deeds of the heroes of his own time or of the near past.

The Homeric poems we must regard as a parallel to works like *Beowulf*, epic and narrative poems based upon the court-poetry of the First Stage.<sup>1</sup> For the third stage of heroic poetry we have no extant examples from Greece, though such poems must once have existed. We do, indeed, find some of the features of popular poetry in the didactic, gnomic and catalogue poems of Hesiod, in the *Theogony* and the *Works and Days*. These present a marked contrast to Homer in various ways. There does not seem to be any acquaintance with court life and little of high respect for royalty. There is no tendency to avoid indelicate subjects as there is in Homer or in Teutonic court-poems.<sup>2</sup> There is little of detailed description except in the discussion of a farmer's life. All these would point to the Hesiodic work as parallels to the products of the third stage, of popular minstrelsy. As for the fourth stage, some of the lost cyclic poems would probably have been very good examples. In the extant literature we get some useful illustrations from Greek drama; and the treatment of the story of Agamemnon's murder and Orestes' revenge is a good case in point.

In Russian heroic poetry we may trace some of these stages. Some of the heroes themselves were expert minstrels, singing to the accompaniment of the gusly, a harp of four octaves. Thus in the story of Stavr Godinovich the Boyar, minstrels were summoned to celebrate the marriage of Prince Vladimir's daughter. The harp-players came and played on

<sup>1</sup> See Chadwick's *H.A.*, pp. 223 ff.

<sup>2</sup> The song of Ares and Aphrodite and the story of Weland are the only exceptions.

the gusly, and "sang songs of the olden days and of the present and of all times". But the bridegroom was not satisfied; he wanted to hear Stavr himself, the master-player upon the harp of maplewood. Stavr was summoned; he strung his harp, played great dances, and "sang songs from over the blue sea". Again, in the story of Dobrynya and Alyosha, Dobrynya on his expeditions came to learn of Alyosha's treachery and dashed back home. He put on his minstrel's garment, took his little gusly of maplewood, and proceeded to Alyosha's wedding-feast. There he tuned his harp and began to sing: "and the theme of his song was Dobrynya's adventures." Now these instances are certainly good examples of the practice of heroic poetry in the Heroic Age itself; they belong to what we have called the first stage and the efforts of Stavr and Dobrynya are good parallels to those of Hirothgar and Achilles.

There does not seem to be any good Russian example of the second stage, but the third stage is very prominent—as a matter of fact, in some parts of Russia it continues to the present day. As Miss Hapgood points out,<sup>1</sup> *Kobzars* still exist in Little Russia, while the singers of *stiks* or religious songs are professionals like the *Kalyeki perekozhie*, the wandering psalm-singers. These last are not very much to the point; but most of the epic songs were recovered from peasants on the borders of Lake Onega only in the last half of the nineteenth century. In the Middle Ages, the Church denounced clowns, fiddlers, and players and those who sang "devilish" or worldly songs; and it has been conjectured that these latter included the epic songs.<sup>2</sup> Such performances of professionals or peasants would be quite an apt parallel to the efforts of Bernlef or Aldhelm; and as a matter of fact most of the recovered poems have the characteristics of Stage III. The characters mentioned by name are few; and the same characters recur in different poems about one district. Thus, in the Kief Cycle Ilya, Dobrynya, Alyosha come in again and again, while the ruling prince is usually Vladimir. The accounts of heroism are often highly exaggerated; and the action of a short poem sometimes takes years instead of days.

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to Hapgood's *Epic Songs of Russia*, pp. xxvii, etc.

<sup>2</sup> One is reminded of Alcuin's denunciation of the songs of Ingeld.



These characteristics are also found in the poems current among the Mahomedans of Bosnia. As has been pointed out by Professor Murko, there is a living heroic poetry among these people, many of the characters in the poems being definitely historical. The minstrel recites his poem to the accompaniment of the *tambura* (a kind of guitar); and considerable freedom is allowed in recitation. Most of the minstrels are peasants and they recite their poems at village gatherings or at some rich man's palace. They are rarely professional minstrels; but each one exercises his creative powers, to some extent. Consequently, there are numerous variants of the same poem, some versions being very much longer than others. These poems may all be said to belong to Stage III; but we do not know if they have passed through Stage I or II. We do not know if they were ever sung by minstrels in the service of noblemen or princes. There may have been provincial noblemen of power and position in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, noblemen who kept professional bards in their household. But it is very doubtful if the position of their minstrels can be compared with that of Deor or "Hrothgares scop".

The Serbian poems dealing with the battle of Kossovo present some sort of a parallel to the *Iliad* in that it is a story of war. So far as poetical qualities go, there may be little likeness between the Homeric poems and the Kossovo taies. But, as Professor Chadwick puts it, "we may strongly suspect that at an earlier stage in the history of Homeric poetry the resemblance would be much closer, although the art of heroic poetry in Greece had doubtless been elaborated for centuries to a far higher degree than was ever attained by Serbian poets." Court-poetry must have died out in Serbia after the fifteenth century; and the later poems we should place in Stage III. Some of these late compositions do show characteristics of Stage III; but the characteristics are absent from things like the banquet-poem which may perhaps be traced back to the fifteenth century.

We cannot go into the Celtic heroic poems in detail here. The Irish evidence is important; but it is very difficult to deal with owing to the difficulty of the language and the enormous mass of the material. The Welsh heroic stories, like the Irish ones, are in prose and have been transformed

very greatly in the course of time. As we now have them they seem to be not much more than folk-tales. The poems of the Cymry dealing with Arthur, Gwallawg, Urien, etc., have little in common with the stories except the names. Most scholars now seem to be of the opinion that these poems are products of a later age based on annals and chronicles—not of the nature of “authentic” heroic poetry. If they are late compositions, they must be said to be a clever copy of the works of Stage I, for their characteristics are mostly those of court-poetry.<sup>1</sup>

We have now to inquire whether minstrelsy is prominent in early Indian literature and if the minstrels carried on heroic tradition. We have also to examine what particular type of minstrels could have been responsible for the epic stories, if indeed these stories are the product of minstrelsy.

Poems of war are not unknown in the oldest Sanskrit literature, in the *R̥g-Veda* for example. Thus one hymn (vii, 18) describes the victory of Sudās, a Tr̥tsu king, over ten rivals. The defeat of Śambara by Divodāsa is repeatedly mentioned.<sup>2</sup> Other passages<sup>3</sup> may be taken to refer to events of war; but for the real cultivation of heroic poetry we get the best early notice from the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*.<sup>4</sup> In connection with the description of a horse-sacrifice we are told that the Brāhmaṇa sings by day and the Rājanya (a man of noble rank) by night. They play on the lute and sing. The Brāhmaṇa sings of topics like “such sacrifices he offered—such gifts he gave”; but the Rājanya sings about the wars of the sacrificer-prince: “Such a war he waged; such a battle he won; —for the battle is the Rājanya’s strength: it is with strength he thus endows him (the prince?).” Again when the prince and the priests are seated together the Adhvaryu (the priest sacrificing) calls upon the Hotṛ (the singer priest), saying: “Hotṛ, recount the beings; raise thou this sacrificer (the prince) above the beings” [or perhaps—Raise this sacrificer above (or up to) the things of the past]. Thus called upon, the Hotṛ prepares to tell the Pāriplava legend, the revolving or recurrent tales

<sup>1</sup> Chadwick's *Heroic Age*, pp. 103 ff. Anwyl's *Prolegomena to the study of Old Welsh Poetry* (pp. 7 ff.) favours the theory of the late origin of the poems.

<sup>2</sup> i, 112, 118, 119: ii, 19, etc.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. i, 63, 7.

<sup>4</sup> xiii, 1, 5, 6; xiii, 4, 3, 5.

which were told at intervals of ten days during the year. He addresses the men and goes over a hymn of the Ṛk to instruct them. Then the masters of the lute-players are called upon to "sing of the sacrificer along with the righteous kings of yore"; and they accordingly sing of him; and in thus singing of him they make him "share the same world with the righteous kings of yore". Then in the evening, whilst oblations for the safe-keeping of the horse are being offered, a Rājanya lute-player strikes up the "uttara-mandrā" tune and sings three stanzas composed by himself: "Such a war he waged, such a battle he won."

What this Rājanya, the man of the military caste, was singing was evidently heroic stories; his work may be said to belong to Stage I of heroic poetry. Elsewhere in Vedic literature we get the phrase "nārāśaṃsī" (celebrating men) and very probably it refers to heroic tales or songs. It is classed with Gāthā and Raibhī in a passage of the *Ṛg-Veda* (x, 85, 6); and is distinguished from Gāthā in a number of passages in later literature.<sup>1</sup> The *Śatapatha* (xi, 5, 6) associates Nārāśaṃsī Gāthās with Itihāsa-Purāṇas as honey-offerings to the gods. The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* describes how Nārāśaṃsī verses should be recited; and the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* (i, 3, 2) speaks of Nārāśaṃsī Gāthās, i.e. the songs celebrating men. In the *Aśvalāyana Gṛhya Sūtras* Nārāśaṃsīs with Itihāsa-Purāṇas are intended to be recited by the reciter of the Vedas. The *Kāthaka Saṃhitā* says that these Nārāśaṃsīs are false; but we cannot rely on such a bare statement, for perhaps the author was thinking more of those verses which were mere eulogies of patrons.<sup>2</sup> The term "Nārāśaṃsī" is clearly paralleled by the Greek "Klea Andrōn", the "glories of heroes" which are sung by Achilles in the *Iliad* (ix, 189). We need have no doubts that the Nārāśaṃsīs were really heroic stories; still, we are not certain if they were partly intended for edification or if they were sung frankly for entertainment by the courtiers of a prince.

Later on, of course, the instructive side was made prominent; and the singing of these was supposed to conduce

<sup>1</sup> The *Vedic Index* (i, p. 443) mentions a number of passages; *Ath.*, xv, 6, 4; *Tait. Sam.*, vii, 5, 11, 2; *Ait. Brā.*, vi, 32; *Kauṣ Brā.*, xxx, 5, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Bloomfield's *Atharva Veda* emphasizes this side of nārāśaṃsīs.

to the spiritual well-being of the hearers. But it may well be explained by Euhemerism, the kings whose deeds were sung being transformed into gods or demi-gods in later times. Once they had been made divine, the story of their prowess would naturally be taken to have a spiritual import; and a work originally intended for entertainment may easily have become in later times a sacred thing. One may take it that the Nārāśamsis were songs of the nature of those sung by the Rājanyas in the Śatapatha or of those which the lute-players in the Pāraskara Gṛhya Sūtras (i, 15, 7) are asked to sing—songs of “the king or anybody else who is more valiant”.

We may now take up the evidence of the *Mahābhārata* itself. We hear frequently of professional singers at the courts of princes, of men whose business it was to eulogize royalty. Thus in iii, 235, Dhṛtarāṣṭra describes how Yudhiṣṭhira, in his days of prosperity, was awakened by sūtas and māgadhas and other singers who recited his praises every morning. vii, 82 tells us how singers gifted with sweet voices sang the praises of the Kuru dynasty. Yudhiṣṭhira, “the delighter of the Kurus,” was praised by all creatures and the minstrels gratified him with panegyrics. Later on “the minstrels and musicians greeted the heroic Arjuna with the sounds of musical instruments and eulogies”. The voices of the bards and minstrels “pronounced benedictions of victory”; and these were accompanied by the sound of musical instruments.

In xv, 23, Yudhiṣṭhira’s praises are sung by a large number of sūtas, māgadhas and bards (vandins). In xii, 53, a batch of well-trained and sweet-voiced persons, conversant with hymns and the *Purāṇas* (stutipurāṇajñāḥ), began to recite the praise of Vāsudeva; and the sounds of musical instruments, viṇās, mṛdangas, and śankhas were heard. In xii, 37, the king’s praises are chanted by sweet-voiced panegyrists and bards (vaidālikaiḥ, sūtaiḥ māgadhaiśca subhāṣitaiḥ). In xiv, 70, actors, bards, and eulogists (naṭāḥ granthikāḥ sūtamāgadhasaṅghāḥ) recited the praises of Janārdana and the Kuru race. The praises of the Pāṇḍavas are hymned by eulogists, sūtas, māgadhas and bards (vandins).<sup>1</sup> When Duryodhana enters a city, bards

<sup>1</sup> xiv, 69.

eulogize him.<sup>1</sup> In xv, 38, Yudhiṣṭhira laments that Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who was formerly roused from sleep every morning by bands of sūtas and māgadhas, had then to sleep on the bare ground. In iv, 72, ākhyānaśīlāḥ, those versed in legendary lore, and vaitālikāḥ, the reciters of genealogies, sing the praises of the prince. Moreover, these bards were not there simply in times of peace and enjoyment. They formed part of the royal retinue in war and Duryodhana, when proceeding to join battle with the Pāṇḍavas, is followed by his bards, singers, and eulogists (v, 197, 18).

Eulogists are thus quite common in the courts of princes, and the question arises whether they sang of the actual deeds of the princes or merely recited conventional panegyrics of the kings. A passage like the last would seem to imply that the two arts went together; and that those who sang the praises of the king were the very people who carried on the old heroic stories and traditional genealogies.<sup>2</sup> This is also what might be expected. Flattery that has no basis in fact may often seem a taunt; and the best panegyrics are those which rest at least in part on actuality. Hence it would be quite natural for these encomiasts to describe the heroic deeds of the prince himself and of his ancestors. They would assuredly exaggerate the deeds of valour and prowess; but unless some of the deeds had been actually performed, the praise would lose its point. Thus it seems probable that the praises were an enumeration of deeds of heroism and mostly of historical deeds too.

But we have more direct evidence of the existence of narrative poetry carried on by oral tradition. Sometimes the princes themselves narrate "the glorious deeds of old", as Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa do (i, 222). Again, later on, when Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna were both at Indraprastha, they narrated to each other tales of war and its hardships. Now these tales may have been prose-narratives of past events; but the first passage seems to imply a set form of words. Even then, of course, we must acknowledge the possibility of prose-narratives handed down by tradition, narratives like those which preserved stories of adventure in Iceland and Ireland.

<sup>1</sup> iii, 256.

<sup>2</sup> I cannot here go into the relation of the old ākhyānas to the epic, nor into the vexed question of the Kuśīlavas.

Yet it appears probable that the stories were sung, for Arjuna seems to have been a skilled singer and musician.

One passage in particular is very significant. When Arjuna explains what profession he will follow in disguise, in Virāṭa's city, he says: "I shall please the king and the ladies by reciting stories often and often. I shall instruct these ladies of Virāṭa's house in singing, in delightful dancing, and in musical performances of various kinds. By reciting various good deeds, I shall be able to keep my identity hidden." He is here connecting his recitations of stories with singing and music; and one is inclined to think that Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, narrating stories of past achievements while the place was filled with the music of the flute, guitars and drums, must have *sung* these stories.<sup>1</sup> Another prince Yayāti is said to sing some gāthās,<sup>2</sup> but these seem to be only moral discourses. Yet gāthās must have been at times pure narratives, for in iii, 88, Mārkaṇḍeya, an illustrious sage, is said to sing a gāthā about king Nṛga and his family.

Elsewhere we get equally definite evidence for the cultivation of narrative poetry carried on by oral tradition. A good example of such poetry is the Paurāṇic story of Vyūṣṭāsva, narrated by the Queen, Kuntī. Persons who recite histories of the gods follow Arjuna when he sets out on his twelve years wanderings. Bards and reciters of *Purāṇas* are prominent in the *svayaṃvara* of Draupadī. In Bk. xii we hear of narratives descending from ancient times, from father to son. In the first part of the first book we are told repeatedly of the recitation of narratives. The most important instance is of the recitation of the main story at the court of the great-grandson of the heroes.<sup>3</sup> The reciter is a priest, Vaiśampāyana; and in v, 141, too, it is said that the Brāhmaṇas will tell the world of the great battle of the *Mahābhārata*.

Further evidence for the transmission of narratives as songs is to be found in the nature of particular descriptions. Thus in the lament of Dhṛtarāṣṭra in i, 1, 150 ff., we find every verse ending with the same words, the refrain being "tadā nāsaṃse vijayāya Sañjaya".<sup>4</sup> A sequence of 65 verses,

<sup>1</sup> See i, 222, 26.

<sup>2</sup> i, 75, and xii, 26.

<sup>3</sup> We must note that no musical accompaniment is mentioned.

<sup>4</sup> "Then I had no hope of success, O Sañjaya."

beginning with the same word and ending with the same phrase, surely shows that the verses were intended to be sung. A better example is perhaps found in the gambling scene in Bk. II. Here, in describing Śakuni's various throws and his winning each stake, the same verse is used over and over again. Everywhere it is "Vaiśampāyana uvāca; | etat śrutvā vyavisito nikṛtim samupāśritaḥ. | Jitamityeva Śakuniryudhiṣṭhiramabhāṣata".<sup>1</sup> Such a refrain in this exciting narrative suggests a division of the poem into strophes in order to make it more suitable for singing. We must note that a refrain like this is rather different from the stock-phrases of a heroic poem, phrases like those in *Beowulf*: "*Beowulf mathelode bearn Ecgtheowes*"<sup>2</sup> or "*Hrothgar mathelode helm scyldinga*".<sup>3</sup>

The introduction of speeches by a stock-description is surely indicative of oral transmission. But the description of a particular action in the same form of words seems to me a better indication of the song-nature of the poems. Such refrains are very common in ballad poetry, in what we may call "folk-songs" transmitted from generation to generation by oral tradition.<sup>4</sup> The other parts of the poem are sung or recited by one person; but the whole company joins in the refrain and sings it in a chorus. This then is more properly a feature of popular minstrelsy, of what we have called Stage III, rather than of court-poetry.

The stock-phrases we have noticed in *Beowulf* have their parallels in the Homeric poems; and one can collect an immense number of such phrases from the *Mahābhārata*. Here we may simply refer to Hopkins' list<sup>5</sup> of the parallel phrases in the two epics. All of them are certainly not to our point; but we can cull quite a number of clichés which must have been a minstrel's stock-in-trade. The introduction of speeches, however, is nothing like so elaborate as in *Beowulf*; it is always straightforward and simple like "*Yudhiṣṭhira uvāca*" or "*Duryodhana uvāca*".

<sup>1</sup> "On hearing this Śakuni, addicted to dieing as he was, adopted unfair means and told Yudhiṣṭhira: 'Lo! I have won.'"

<sup>2</sup> *Beowulf*, the son of Ecgtheow, spoke.

<sup>3</sup> *Hrothgar*, the protector of the *Scyldingas*, spoke.

<sup>4</sup> We may compare it with the refrains of some mediæval English ballads, e.g., "*A Lyke-Wake Dirge*" or "*Milddams o' Binnorie*".

<sup>5</sup> Appendix A, op. cit., *Gt. Epic*.

The presence of stock-phrases and refrains does surely point to oral transmission. But in the introduction to the first book (i, 170 ff.) we are told that after the poem had been composed by Vyāsa it was *written down* by Gaṇeśa. This looks very much like a late addition, especially because Gaṇeśa is the god of lexicography, according to later mythology. When the poem was being written down in later times, it would be natural for some scribes to think that the task of the first writer must have been too stupendous for human hands and only Gaṇeśa could have done it. Such a suspicion, based on *a priori* grounds, is confirmed by Professor Winternitz's latest investigations into Ādi Parva manuscripts.<sup>1</sup> He is inclined to reject the *gaṇanāyaka* passage as spurious, as a very late addition absent from the best manuscripts.

There are other references to writing. In ii, 5, we hear of "clerks", "lekha-kāḥ." Inscriptions are mentioned in xiii, 139; and xiii, 23, speaks of "*reading* the Vedas". ii, 55, mentions "lekhyam" a figure—a word occurring again in x, 148, though there it probably means "a picture". Clerks "lekha-kāḥ" are also mentioned in xv, 14; and in vii, 97 we are told of Arjuna's arrows, which were "nāmāṅkita", had names engraved on them. iii, 15 speaks of a sign used for entering and leaving a city; this may or may not be something in writing. But the reference in v, 191 is more definite, for speaking of the education of Draupadi, Bhīṣma says that her father took care to teach her writing and other arts.

These references are there; but we must note that they occur rarely in the heroic portions, the last passage being perhaps exceptional in this respect. A very common phrase in the introduction of stories is, "so it has been heard," as in viii, 38. In the Heroic Age itself, writing was almost certainly unknown. Even in later times, after the art of writing had come in, heroic poetry would probably be carried on by oral tradition. The want of suitable and durable materials for writing on may have contributed to this.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The results of these investigations have not yet been published, but are expected to appear shortly in the *Ādi-Parva* edited by the Bhandarkar Research Institute.

<sup>2</sup> Burnell in his *Elements of South Indian Palaeography* says: "In considering the question of the age and extent of the use of writing in India, it is important to point out that the want of suitable materials, in the North at least, before the introduction of paper, must have been a great obstacle to its general use." For the antiquity of Indian writing, see Weber's *History of Indian Literature*, pp. 10, 13, 15, etc.



But certainly a more important factor was the continuance of minstrelsy, of recitation from memory, though the minstrels would then be probably of a class different from that of the early ones.

This leads us on to a consideration of the status and caste of the minstrel both in early and in late times. The Śatapatha distinguishes very clearly the business of the Kṣatriya minstrel from that of the Brāhmaṇa. It is the former who tells of war and strife; it is he who carries on the heroic stories. The Brāhmaṇa is concerned with tales of sacrifices and gifts—at best with the tales recurrent throughout the year, tales which must have been intended mainly for the edification of the hearers. The fact that the “*nārāsaṃsī gāthās*” were supposed to have an elevating influence might suggest that they were sung by the priests alone; in the epic itself we have some evidence to support that idea. Vaiśampāyana who recites the main story, Bhṛadaśva who recites the Nala story, Mārkaṇḍeya who recites the Rāma and Sāvitrī stories, are all apparently Brāhmaṇas; and we have noticed a passage in the fifth book saying that the Brāhmaṇas will tell the world of the great battle. There is even clearer evidence: Śarmiṣṭhā, the daughter of the Asura king, quarrels with Devayānī, the daughter of the preceptor of the Asuras. When Devayānī wants to assert her superiority as the daughter of the learned priest, Śarmiṣṭhā replies contemptuously: “Your father adores mine like a *vandin*, a chanter of praises. Your father chants the praises of others, and my father’s praises are chanted. Your father lives on alms, and my father bestows them.”<sup>1</sup> This would indicate that one of the functions of the priest was to act as the panegyrist of his patron; and that probably means that he was engaged in reciting the heroic deeds of the prince and his family.

But the Brāhmaṇas were not the only minstrels. There were others more directly in the line of the Rājanya of the Śatapatha. We have already noticed the bardic accomplishments of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa; Duryodhana too seems to have been well acquainted with the art.<sup>2</sup> Again, one is inclined to suspect that all the singing sages were not after all Brāhmaṇas. Let us take Bhṛadaśva, for example: he is

<sup>1</sup> *Mbh.*, i, 78, 9-10

<sup>2</sup> viii, 33.

described as a "mahānṛṣi", a great sage, who came to Yudhiṣṭhira, when the latter was living in exile in the forest. The name Brhadaśva, however, is a typically Kṣatriya name. The Kṣatriyas' occupations were reflected in their names; and if we examine any long lists of ancient dynasties, we shall see how common the ending "-aśva" (horse) or "ratha" (chariot) is. In the list of the Ikṣvāku line, for example, in the list of kings between Ikṣvāku and Brhatkṣaya, there are twelve kings whose names end "-aśva" and three end in "-ratha"; in the shorter Videha list there are three "aśvas" and two "rathas", in the East Ānava list there are nine "rathas"; and all the other lists have a considerable number of the horse and chariot men. The name Brhadaśva itself occurs in the Ikṣvāku list; one wonders if the reciter of the Nala story is not a Kṣatriya too. It was not uncommon for princes to live in retirement in old age, to lead an ascetic life in the forest; and a great "sage" may be such a prince for all that we know.

But there is a third class of minstrels to be taken account of, the people called *sūtas* and *māgadhas*. These *sūtas* and *māgadhas* are professional court-minstrels, both in the epic and in the *Purāṇas*; it has been generally held that they were members of a mixed caste. Thus *Mbh.* xiii, 48 says: "The offspring of the Kṣatriya and the Brāhmaṇi is the sūta whose duties are all connected with the recitation of eulogies and encomiums of kings and other great men. The offspring of the Vaiśya and the Kṣatriya is the vandin or māgadha; and the duties assigned to him are eloquent recitations of praise." The sūta is elsewhere a charioteer,<sup>1</sup> and he is evidently a man of the mixed caste too. Yet Kauṭilya has a rather puzzling statement about the sūta and the māgadha. He says<sup>2</sup> that the son of a Kṣatriya and a Brāhmaṇa woman is the sūta, that of a Vaiśya and a woman of a higher caste is the māgadha. But he goes on to say: "The sūta who is mentioned in the *Purāṇas* is different, and so also is the māgadha who is mentioned there from Brāhmaṇa,—Kṣatriya offspring, by a real distinction."<sup>3</sup> This passage leaves us

<sup>1</sup> We may take Karna's reputed father.

<sup>2</sup> *Arthaśāstra*, iii, 7.

<sup>3</sup> This is Pargiter's translation of: *Paurāṇikastvanyas sūtomāgadhasca brahma-kṣatrād viśeṣataḥ*. Mr. Shama Sastri translates it thus: "But men of the names Sūta and Māgadha, celebrated in the *Purāṇas*, are quite different and of greater merit than either Brāhmaṇas or Kṣatriyas."

doubtful if the minstrels, *sūtas*, etc., formed one or two distinct castes of their own, or if men of the ordinary castes, *Brāhmaṇas*, *Kṣatriyas*, or *Vaiśyas*, could be minstrels. There is a passage in *Mbh.* xii, 59, where we are told of two ancestors of *sūtas* and *māgadhas*: "Two persons named *Sūta* and *Māgadha* became the bard and panegyrist of *Ṛṣhu*. *Ṛṣhu* gave unto *Sūta* some land lying on the sea-coast and unto *Māgadha* the country known as *Magadha*." This passage is evidently a late introduction and will not lead us very far.

We have then three types of bards, the priest, the military man, and the professional court-minstrel who was probably neither a priest nor a warrior.<sup>1</sup> All these three seem to have carried on the poetry of what we have called Stage I, though some doubt may be expressed as to whether the *sūta* or *māgadha* as panegyrist sang heroic narratives or not. The later evidence, however, always takes the *sūta* to be a court bard, and we have seen that very probably he sang heroic stories, just as the warrior or the priest sometimes did. The western heroic poetry tells us about the royal bard and the professional bard; the priestly minstrel is not so prominent. But Ammianus Marcellinus (xv, 10, ad fin.) speaks of the Gaulish priestly bard: "The bards were accustomed to employ themselves in celebrating the brave achievements of their illustrious men, in epic verse, accompanied with sweet airs on the lyre." Panegyric poems are frequently attributed to these priestly minstrels. Then there were the Irish *file*, persons of a priestly character, who were at least partly responsible for the transmission of narrative poetry. The Irish sagas contain very many quotations from their poems. Moreover, it has been conjectured that the Irish sagas were originally in verse; but that owing to changes in the language, the dropping of old inflexions and endings, the old verse was transformed into prose. The Celtic bard thus seems to be the nearest parallel to the priestly singer of our epic. This parallelism is all the more interesting because it is only among the Celts that we hear of an almost exclusively priestly caste corresponding to the *Brāhmaṇas* of India.

<sup>1</sup> We may, however, remember that *Kicaka*, commander of *Virāṭa*'s forces, is called "*sūta* " or "*sūta putra* " (iv, 14, 48; 15, 4; 16, 5, etc.).

The Greek and Teutonic princes of the Heroic Age had their professional minstrels; and at first sight we might be inclined to suppose that the *sūta* occupied the position Demodokos had in Alkinoos' court or Phemios in Odysseus' or Deor in that of his patron. Yet there is a vital difference. The Greek minstrels of the type of Demodokos seem to have had an important position at the court. Agamemnon is said to have left his queen in charge of a minstrel (*Odys.* iii) and in *Odys.* viii Demodokos is called a "lord", the Greek word being one often applied to princes. The Teutonic *scop* too appears to have had a recognized position. He received a grant of land from the king,<sup>1</sup> and he may have been a "king's thegn".<sup>2</sup> The Indian *sūta*, as we find him, is a much humbler individual. Whatever he might originally have been, we see him reduced to the position of an underling, one who is no better than a professional flatterer or clown.

Yet the business of minstrelsy, of singing heroic narratives, could not have been looked down on in the Heroic Age. When princes practised it, when Arjuna and Duryodhana took it on themselves to narrate heroic stories, it could not have been a despised art. These princes do what the Teutonic or Greek prince, Hrothgar or Achilles, did; they turned to the recitation of poetry when there was nothing more important to engage them. Is it then possible that the court-minstrel always occupied the position the *sūta* seems to do? The solution of this question will help us to differentiate the various stages of Indian heroic poetry, for apparently the stages here are not exactly the same as among the Teutons or the Greeks. And the difference seems to be mainly due to the presence of a class of *litvati*, the priestly singers who had so much to do with the oral transmission of all the early literature of India. We have analysed the material at our disposal, and it seems to me we are now in a position to postulate the following stages in the history of Indian heroic poetry.

In the First Stage, we may place the court-poems of the Heroic Age itself. The court-minstrel was most probably not a priest, but a member of the warrior caste. He had a recognized position at the court; and he was not looked on as a mere encomiast. To this stage belong the old lays

<sup>1</sup> Deor, lines 40-41.

<sup>2</sup> Beowulf, 867.

dealing with Purūravas, Nahuṣa, and Yayāti, kings who felt the superiority of the warrior over all others, including the priest. The earliest version of our main story too belongs to this stage; only then the leading figures in the story—at least the leading figures on the Pāṇḍava side—were Arjuna and Bhīma contending against Karna and Duryodhana. If the earliest version was not of a Kuru-Pāṇḍava war, but of a Kuru-Pāñcāla one, the protagonists must have been Duryodhana and Karna, Śikhaṇḍin and Dhṛṣṭadyumna with Bhīma and Arjuna in the background. Whoever the leading characters were, they were men of the true heroic mould; a king like Yudhiṣṭhira, with a sentimental weakness for priestcraft and religiosity, would have no place in it.<sup>1</sup>

To the Second Stage belong the epic or narrative poems based on the old court-poems. One of these was perhaps the old *Bhārati Kathā*, dealing mainly with the story of a great battle in which all the prominent kings of Northern and Central India took part. Stories of other kings, of Yayāti and Nahuṣa, of Purūravas and Nala, were probably introduced as episodes. Court-poetry was still flourishing, but it was rapidly undergoing a change in character. The great battle may have led to a centralization of power; and smaller kingdoms were perhaps gradually losing their identity, being merged in bigger coalitions which might be called empires. Many of the older dynasties would now have lost their power and position; and the centres of court-minstrelsy must have been greatly reduced in number. But probably there was an even greater change. The rulers at the new centres did not, perhaps, belong to any of the powerful dynasties of the past. They were a set of *nouveaux riches* and had little interest in the stories of the deeds of the older dynasties. The old court minstrels would be little prized at these new courts, for the direct appeal of the old stories would be gone.

These conditions must have produced the narrative poetry of the Third Stage. If the tales of the warrior-minstrel were no longer prized, there was another class of singers who were not placed at the same disadvantage. The priestly

<sup>1</sup> The fact that the Jātaka version of the Pāṇḍava story makes Arjuna the eldest brother may have some significance.

songs of sacrifice and ascetic life would still have the same popularity or unpopularity as of old. Perhaps these songs had increased in popularity in that the sense of formal religion had grown stronger ; with the decay of the old heroic spirit, superstition had gained ground and princes were inclined to listen to boring and dull pieces on the supposition that spiritual good would accrue from it.

Yet the priests must have felt the shortcomings of their songs ; they could perhaps see how their end could be gained at the same time that these songs were made more interesting. They must have known the substance of the old heroic stories, if not the entire poems ; and the more capable among them might now turn their hands to reshape the old tales. The old story would be still narrated ; but it would have a moral and religious interest attached to it. The incidents might be retained ; but the characters would put on a new garb ; and the appeal of the whole would be different. Purely heroic figures would now tend to sink to the background ; and moralist-religious heroes would come to the forefront. The superiority of the priesthood would naturally be emphasized ; and the stories of such kings as Purūravas, Nahuṣa and Yayāti, of kings whose relations with the priests were not of the happiest, and the like would be badly mauled. The priest would sing his stories at the royal court, but he would not belong exclusively to the court nor would he be the official bard. Such a bard would be the *sūta* or the *māgadha* or the *vandin*. They would sing the king's praises, often perhaps with fulsome flattery ; if they sang narrative poems at all, these must be used only to give point to the flattery. Still they would perhaps carry on the pure heroic tradition, untainted by any religious bias.<sup>1</sup> But their influence would be as nothing compared to that of the priests. The priestly tales would appeal not only to royalty but to the masses at large ; and this

<sup>1</sup> The result of this gradual deterioration of the secular court-minstrel's position may have been to a certain extent analogous to Stage III in the history of Western stories. The Indian poems can hardly have come into the hands of the *literati* till a fairly late date. Otherwise the poems would presumably be preserved in an older form of language analogous to that of the Vedas. It would seem that the poems had been greatly modernized in language before their form became stereotyped ; and this would be natural enough if they were carried on for long ages by non-literate minstrels.

wide appeal would lead to more ambitious works based on the priestly tales.

Thus we have a Fourth Stage of narrative poetry, a stage in which we are not very much interested, for here are works in which the heroic interest has been completely thrust into the background; and didacticism looms large. The works are capable of indefinite expansion; but expansion always means the addition of new didactic material. The additions go on; and gradually we have a monumental thing—the *Mahābhārata*.

## NOTE

### EARLY TAMIL NARRATIVE POETRY

Minstrelsy is prominent in these old Tamil narratives, and four types of bards are mentioned : (1) *Panar*, a not very reputable class of minstrels, associated with harlots ; (2) *Koothihar*, actors who took part in ballet-like compositions ; (3) *Porunnar*, war-bards, generally members of the suite of a chief or king ; (4) *Viraliyar*, female bards with duties similar to the *Porunnar*.

G. U. Pope in *J.R.A.S.*, 1899 (pp. 225 ff.) gives a detailed account of an early Tamil heroic poem, the *Purra-Poruḷ Venḷa-Mālai*, a work which in its present form dates from about the tenth century, but which is really based on much older works of mythic origin. It is divided into twelve sections, the first one of which introduces us to a band of cattle raiders. We are told of the expedition for the cattle, the fight, the capture of the herd, the division of the spoils and the feast. The second section introduces the rescuers and the third describes their with the defence of the realm, particularly of the Fort, and the sixth invasion of the enemies' territories. The fourth and fifth are concerned concentrates its attention on the besiegers' attacks. In the general description of the war in Section VII, we come across an instance of *Suttee*, the widow of a king accompanying her husband in death. The eighth and ninth sections are mainly taken up with Royalty and the last three sections introduce miscellaneous interests.

In its subject-matter, the theme of cattle-lifting involving a war, as also in the treatment of the theme, this Tamil poem invites a comparison with heroic poems in other languages.



## CHAPTER V

### THE COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF HEROIC POETRY

**H**EROIC stories were handed down by oral tradition in various countries, generally in verse-form, for even in the case of a country like Ireland, where in later times we get only prose stories, it has been conjectured that the original medium was verse. The stories were probably first sung in the courts of princes of the Heroic Age in the form of lays; these lays were, later on, the bases of heroic works on a more ambitious scale. The long heroic narratives based on the smaller lays have been styled "heroic epics"; and they were not perhaps put down in writing and probably had no fixed form in the beginning. The work underwent a gradual growth and it was only after a length of time that its form was fixed. The final form of these works may or may not have been the accomplishment of one individual; but even if one individual was responsible for it, he was drawing on a common store-house of tradition and probably incorporating in his work a good deal of matter in exactly the same form in which it was being handed on.

Such a treatment of heroic stories must be carefully distinguished from ambitious works of another type, from what may be called "imitative" or "literary" epics, as opposed to the "authentic" or "heroic" epics. The "literary" epic is the product of a later generation, avowedly intended to rival the "authentic" work. It strives to imitate the "authentic" manner, it attempts to deal with truly heroic stories. But the whole thing is the product of one individual poet and all that he can depend on is a vague sketch of his story coming down from earlier times. He takes up this thin narrative and tries to amplify this into the true epic length in the style of the heroic epics of old. But while the latter-day poet has to build up the whole thing himself, the final form of the ancient heroic epic is achieved only by additions to and alterations of a mass of work already existing.

Thus we can look out for various differences between the "authentic" and "literary" epics; and we take the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* and *Beowulf* as examples of the former, while the *Aeneid* would be a very good example of the latter. The former may or may not be traced to a vague and shadowy author; but with the latter we are certain of individual authorship and the personality of the author is sufficiently well-defined. Virgil, the poet of Augustan Rome, has at least as much of individuality as Shakespeare, quite different from that of the shadowy Homer, the one solid point of whose biography is that in the concluding passage of the "Hymn to Delian Apollo" in the *Homeric Hymns*: "A blind man who dwelleth in rocky Chios. His songs will be the best even in days to come."

In the authentic epics we generally get no reference to the descendants of the main heroes, descendants who played a part in the history of later times. In the "literary" type we very often come across such passages; we may take the *Aeneid* vi, 842 ff. as a good example. The only passage of this nature in Homer is one in Bk. xx of the *Iliad* referring to Aineias: "It is appointed to him to escape, that the race of Dardanos perish not without seed or sign, even Dardanos whom the son of Kronos loved above all the children born to him from the daughters of men. For the race of Priam hath Zeus already hated. But thus shall the might of Aineias reign among the Trojans, and his children's children, who shall be born in the after-time."<sup>1</sup> There may be a reference here to the greatness of Aineias's descendants in another land, to kings reigning in the poet's time somewhere in the neighbourhood of Troy or at any rate somewhere in North-Western Asia Minor or Thrace.<sup>2</sup> But such references are exceptional in Homer and never occur in *Beowulf*. In the *Aeneid*, on the other hand, the author is interested in the hero not so much for the sake of his heroic achievements as for the fact that he was the ancestor of a particular line of kings ruling a land or a nation whose fortunes concern the author.

This leads us on to a vital difference between the Homeric and the Virgilian types, a difference in this that the latter is

<sup>1</sup> Translation of Lang, Leaf, and Myers.

<sup>2</sup> The traditional story of Aineias's conquest of Italy is probably not so ancient.

more concerned with the fortunes of nations and states, while the former is more so with individuals and their heroic deeds. The interest of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is not in the advance of the Greek cause or in the exaltation of some Greek state. It is in the fortunes of Achilles and Agamemnon, of Hektor and Odysseus that we are interested; and the personal element is the most absorbing factor in polity and war. The Greeks are invading Troy, not from any national or patriotic motives, but to avenge the insult done to an individual Greek prince by a Trojan. The war too is not so much the conflict of armies as a whole; it resolves itself in fights between individuals on whose prowess the fate of the campaign seems to depend. The absence of a hero like Achilles means disaster for his side and his return implies the discomfiture of his foes. The chief events of the prolonged contest, the events on which our interest is focussed, are the hand-to-hand fights between Menelaos and Paris, between Hektor and Patroklos, between Aineias and Diomedes, between Hektor and Achilles. The fate of the battle depends on these single combats and individual bravery is the one important element of the epic. Not so, however, in the *Aeneid* which is as much the epic of Rome as of Aeneas. The greatness of Aeneas is not so much in his acts of prowess as in his being the progenitor of the Romans. The author's nationalism looms large; and in his case at least it seems possible to apply Addison's dictum about heroic poetry—that it should be emblematic of the author's patriotism and should convey a moral applicable to the state of the country at the time of the author. However absurd this idea may be if applied to the *Iliad* or *Beowulf*, it seems at least partly true of the *Aeneid*.

One main difference then between the Virgilian and the Homeric types is that the one is national while the other is international; and there is a good reason why it should be international. The minstrel's songs, on which these heroic works were based, were not meant to be sung at the court of only one prince. They may have been composed in honour of a particular king; but emphasis was laid on his heroism rather than on his nationality, in order that they might be popular at other courts too. A hero would always appreciate a praise of heroism but would have no liking for the glorification of a different nationality. Thus songs which

were meant to have an international currency focussed the interest on the heroism of the individual and kept his nationality in the background.

There are, however, other differences as well, for example, the matter of the compression of the events within a short space of time. The literary epic generally covers a long period—perhaps the space of a man's life, taking in most events from his birth to his death. Or again it may describe the history of a land for a considerable period. But the action of the authentic epic is much more concentrated. The action of the *Iliad* covers just a few days; the action of the *Odyssey* occupies only the last six weeks of the ten years of Odysseus' wanderings. It is true that *Beowulf* takes up a long space of time. But, as has often been pointed out, it is really made up of two detached parts, the Grendel-adventure and the dragon-adventure; and in each part the action is quite swift. Of course, in all heroic epics we have episodes summarizing other heroic stories within a short compass, and the action of these stories certainly takes up a long period. Thus in *Beowulf* we have the Finn episode sketched in a few lines and the events of a comparatively long space of time had to be crammed within that. Now a comparison of this episode with the Finnsburg fragment will show an essential difference between the two styles.

In the former the interest is one only of the progress of events, for the shortness of space does not admit of anything else. In the fragment, on the other hand, fullness of detail is possible; and so the interest is one of heroic situations and heroic sentiments. The description of the events of a long period with this fullness of detail would assume monumental proportions. An account of the events of ten years in the same detailed manner as of a few days would take up a vast number of lines and would mean the repetition of almost similar details, thereby involving monotony and sacrificing the unity of action gained from compression. The poet can thus only deal conveniently with a short space of time. On the other hand, the interest of the episodes is, in a sense, the same as that of the literary epics—the interest, namely, of a sequence of events describing the life history of an individual or, at any rate, the events of a considerable portion of his life.

Again in the authentic epic the fact of oral transmission is very prominent. Speeches are constantly introduced in a set form, the same formulae being repeated over and over again. Thus in the first part of *Beowulf* eight out of the thirteen speeches of *Beowulf* are introduced with the same words: "*Beowulf mathelode bearn Ecgtheowes*"; and three out of *Hrothgar's* seven speeches are prefaced by: "*Hrothgar mathelode helm Scyldinga*." This would seem to indicate that the person who was reporting these speeches felt the importance of the speakers and could describe their speaking only in a formal way.

It would be interesting to see how far the *Mahābhārata* possesses these features of authentic epics. First we must notice that the work is supposed to be recited at the court of the great-grandson of one of the chief heroes, so that at least three generations of descendants seem to be implied. Yet in the work itself no one later than *Abhimanyu*, son of the hero, *Arjuna*, plays a leading part. The birth of *Abhimanyu's* son is just mentioned in one of the later books; and the story itself has nothing to do with *Janamejaya*, *Abhimanyu's* grandson. But if the *Mahābhārata* is not concerned with the descendants of heroes it cannot be said to be equally uninterested in their ancestors.<sup>1</sup> *Devavrata Bhīṣma*, the brother of their grandfather, takes an active part in the great battle and is, for a time, the leader of the *Kuru* army. The ancestors beyond *Bhīṣma* are not brought into the main story but figure in some episodes; and it is very difficult to bring these episodes within the true heroic category. Firstly, they are literary abridgements of the type of the *Finn* episode in *Beowulf*; and secondly, they are not always even heroic in tone. The main characters of *Yayāti's* story are divine or semi-divine in nature, while the different versions of the *Nahuṣa* legend bring in different interests. *Sakuntalā's* story has been supposed to be a late addition; neither the matter nor the form has anything common with the main parts of the story. The theme is one of romantic love which rarely plays a part in heroic stories. The full and ambitious descriptions of natural scenes and surroundings remind one more of the works of a later age—

<sup>1</sup> The opening lines of *Beowulf* introduce the ancestors of *Hrothgar*; and the eleventh book of the *Odyssey* introduces some heroes of the past.

of the dramas of Kālidāsa and others. There is fullness of detail in the epic ; but as we shall see later on, the fullness is in descriptions of action rather than of anything else. Then again, in the heroic parts, speeches occupy a considerable portion of the work, as they do in Homer or Beowulf ; but in the Śakuntalā episode, as in other literary abridgements, there is too much of description in the third person. Other episodes dealing with the heroes' ancestors have the same features ; and we feel that they are accretions to our story introduced perhaps in later times.

However, even if we take up only the story of the main heroes, it does not seem to show all the features we have associated above with the " authentic " epics. The action seems to be very diffuse and covers a very long period of time, the space of the whole life of the heroes. Yet this diffuseness is more apparent than real, as indeed is the case with Beowulf. The parts of the story dealing with fighting proper take up five books, Bks. vi to x ; and the addition of this part is certainly compressed within a few days. Then there are the Prologue and the Epilogue. Of the former the second, fourth, and fifth books are mainly heroic ; but the first and third with their profusion of episodes, mostly very long ones in the case of the latter, are the most composite in their structure. They have heroic scenes and episodes ; but an extraordinarily vast amount of matter has been put into these books. Naturally it cannot be called purely heroic, and would require the most careful sifting for purposes of evidence. As regards the epilogue, the twelfth and thirteenth books concern us very little. The eleventh is a very small book. While the fourteenth has a good deal of useful matter, the latter books have practically no heroic interest. Thus in the nucleus of the work the action is fairly well compressed ; and it is chiefly here that we must look for the features of heroic poetry.

The interest of the main story is centred on the doings of a group of individuals and national or tribal interest is rarely prominent. As a matter of fact, the rival heroes are said to belong to the same family though here we are not concerned with the problem of the correctness or incorrectness of this description. There is a religious interest, there is perhaps an attempt to exalt one particular cult at the expense

of others; but how far this forms part of the heroic epic will have to be discussed elsewhere. Here we must emphasize what is apparent on a first reading of the *Mahābhārata*, that it is a story of the heroism of Arjuna and Karna, of Bhīma and Bhīṣma and the question of patriotism or tribal supremacy never strikes us. Numerous princes come to help the heroes on either side, and one feels that it is always the personal factor which determines these alliances.

As we shall have to point out later on, Drupada, originally an enemy of the Pāṇḍavas, became their firmest ally through the tie of marriage, while a similar bond cemented the alliance between Virāṭa and the Pāṇḍavas. In the actual fighting again, the interest is always focussed on the deeds of individual heroes and the issue of the battle hangs not so much on the clash of whole armies as on single combats between distinguished warriors on either side, combats which frequently take the shape of hand-to-hand fights. Thus the death of Ghaṭotkaca is regarded as a great disaster by the Pāṇḍavas, while the fact that he in dying slew an entire division of the enemies' soldiers does not seem worth any exultation. The only redeeming feature in Ghaṭotkaca's death is that Karna in slaying him has lost the weapon which he had kept specially for use against Arjuna. The safety of Arjuna or of any distinguished hero is a much more important thing than the slaughter of thousands of the common soldiers of the enemy. So the land-marks of the great battle are not the repulse of one division or another, but the slaying of Bhīṣma by Arjuna, of Abhimanyu by Jayadratha, of Droṇa by Dhṛṣṭadyumna, of Ghaṭotkaca by Karna, of Karna by Arjuna, of Śalya by Yudhiṣṭhira and of Duryodhana by Bhīma. As one or the other hero is slain, victory seems to lean to his enemies, until with the destruction of all the great generals of the Kurus, the Pāṇḍavas can claim to be the final victors.

In the discussion of ancient Indian minstrelsy in the last chapter we went into the evidences of the oral transmission of heroic stories<sup>1</sup> and we noticed that generally no conventional formulæ were used for the introduction of speeches. But there is certainly a fullness of detail in other matters.

<sup>1</sup> Here we may add the fact of the repetition of so many descriptions, the thing being narrated once in the third person and once in the first, e.g. the same adventures of Duryodhana are described in the third person in ii, 47, 8 ff., and in the first in iii, 80, 25 ff.

In the western heroic poems the movements of royal personages are carefully noted. Thus the *Odyssey*, i, 328 ff. has: "From her upper chamber the daughter of Ikarios, wise Penelope, caught the glorious strain; and she went down the high stairs from her chamber, not alone, for two of her handmaids bore her company. Now when the fair lady had come unto the wooers, she stood by the pillar of the well-built roof holding up her glistening tire before her face; and a faithful maiden stood on either side her."<sup>1</sup> So again, *Beowulf*, 11,669 ff. has: "complete confidence had surely the prince of the Geatas in his impetuous strength and in the favour of God when he put off his iron corslet and the helm from his head, and gave his decorated sword, an excellent weapon, to his attendant squire, bidding him to take charge of the harness of battle." Or, again, 11,921 ff.: "As for the king himself, the guardian of the ring-hoards, famed for his sterling qualities, he likewise strode majestically from his bed-chamber with a great following, and with him his queen traversed the ascent to the mead-hall, accompanied by a band of maidens. When Hrothgar arrived at the hall, he stood by the pillar (*on stapole*), gazing on the lofty roof, adorned with gold, and on Grendel's arm."<sup>2</sup>

With these passages we may compare *Mbh.* vi, 108, 58 ff.: "After having discussed the matter, the heroic Pāṇḍavas together with the highly powerful son of Vasudeva went towards the tent of Bhīṣma. They had already put off their armours and dresses; and entering the tent, they all touched Bhīṣma's feet with their hands. Then, O mighty monarch, the Pāṇḍavas saluted that foremost of the Bhāratas with their bent heads and sought his protection. On this the mighty armed Bhīṣma, the grandfather of the Kurus, thus addressed them . . ." Or again, ii, 59, 1 ff.: "Having entered the assembly-hall, the sons of Prithā with Yudhiṣṭhira at their head, met all the kings present there. They worshipped all those who deserved to be worshipped, and saluted others as each deserved according to his age; and then they seated themselves on seats covered with costly carpets."

The stages in the arrival and reception of visitors are generally described with great elaboration. The arrival of

<sup>1</sup> Butcher and Lang's translation.

<sup>2</sup> Professor Chadwick's translation.



Telemachos and the disguised Pallas Athene at the court of Nestor may be taken as an illustration: "They came to the gathering and session of the men of Pylos. There was Nestor seated with his sons and round him his company making ready the feast, and roasting some of the flesh and spitting other. Now when they saw the strangers, they went all together, and clasped their hands in welcome, and would have them sit down. First Peisistratos, son of Nestor, drew nigh, and took the hands of each and made them to sit down at the feast on soft fleeces upon the sea sand, beside his brother Thrasymedes and his father. And he gave them messes of the inner meat and poured wine into a golden cup, and pledging her, he spake unto Pallas Athene . . . Therewith he placed in her hand the cup of sweet wine . . . And she gave Telemachos the fair two-handled cup." <sup>1</sup>

The arrival of Beowulf at Hrothgar's court is as fully described in 331 ff. Beowulf is addressed by a henchman of Hrothgar's and replies, describing his mission. Wulfgar carries the message to Hrothgar: "Quickly then he sped to where Hrothgar was sitting, aged and grey-haired among his retinue of nobles. Exulting in his prowess he passed on until he took his stand at the side of the prince of the Danes; for he knew the usage of chivalry."<sup>2</sup> Then Wulfgar addresses the king and the latter replies; and Wulfgar carries a message of welcome to Beowulf.

With these we may compare the account of Yudhiṣṭhira's arrival at Hastināpura in ii, 58: "Having arrived at Hastināpura, he went to Dhṛtarāṣṭra's palace. The high-souled Pāṇḍava then met Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Karṇa and Kṛpa. He also met the son of Droṇa. He duly saluted and embraced all of them and was saluted and embraced by them in return." He met various other princes who had arrived before him; then accompanied by his brothers, he "entered the palace of the wise king Dhṛtarāṣṭra and there saw the lady Gāndhārī, ever obedient to her husband. She was surrounded by her daughters-in-law like Rohini by the stars. He saluted Gāndhārī and was blest by her in return". Or again we may take i, 208, 7 ff.: "At the command of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Vidura went to Drupada and the Pāṇḍavas. He carried with him numerous jewels, etc.,

<sup>1</sup> Butcher and Lang's translation. <sup>2</sup> Professor Chadwick's translation.

for Drupada, his daughter and the Pāṇḍavas. O king, on having arrived there that virtuous man, proficient in all sacred lore, addressed Drupada in the proper fashion and waited upon him. Drupada too accorded to Vidura a proper reception; and they enquired after each other's welfare. O Bhārata, there he saw the Pāṇḍavas and Kṛṣṇa and embraced them, after having enquired about their welfare. They too worshipped in due order Vidura of immeasurable intelligence, who addressed words of affection to them. He then gave to the Pāṇḍavas, etc., the gems and various valuable things sent by the Kurus . . . "

Perhaps an equally good parallel to these *Mahābhārata* passages is to be found in some scenes of the *Odyssey* or *Beowulf*, scenes where friends are greeted or bidden farewell. Thus the emotions are very fully described in *Od.*, xvi, 14 ff. : " And he (Eumaios) came over against his master and kissed his head and both his beautiful eyes and both his hands, and he let a great tear fall. And even as a loving father welcomes his son that has come in the tenth year from a far country, his only son and well-beloved, for whose sake he has had great sorrow and travail, even so did the goodly swineherd fall upon the neck of godlike Telemachos and kiss him all over as one escaped from death, and he wept aloud."<sup>1</sup>

Again, we may take the scene of Hrothgar's farewell to *Beowulf* (1870 ff.) : " Then did the king of noble lineage, the prince of the Scyldingas, kiss that best of squires and clasp him round the neck. Tears fell from him, as he stood there with his grey hair. Aged and venerable as he was, he felt uncertain, indeed he thought it unlikely, that they would ever meet again in spirited converse. So dear was this man to him that he could not restrain his heart's emotion; but in his breast, fast bound within his heart, a secret longing for the beloved man burnt in his blood."<sup>2</sup> With this we may compare a scene of farewell in the *Mahābhārata*, for example, ii, 78-9, where Yudhiṣṭhira bids farewell to all the friends and relatives of the Kurus. Vidura persuades him to leave his mother behind and hopes to see him return in safety and crowned with success. " Then when Draupadī was about to start, she went to the illustrious Kuntī and prayed for permission to depart. She asked her and the other ladies (of the

<sup>1</sup> Butcher and Lang's translation. <sup>2</sup> Professor Chadwick's translation.

royal household), who were all plunged in grief. After saluting and embracing each one of them as she deserved, she desired to go away. Thereupon loud lamentations were heard from within the inner apartment of the Pāṇḍavas. Kuntī was greatly afflicted on seeing Draupadī about to start on her journey and uttered these words in a voice choked with grief."

Similes are very common in the Homeric poems and they are often very ambitious, expatiating on details which have little to do with the point of comparison. We may take, for example, xi, 112 ff. : "And as a lion easily crusheth the young fawns of a swift hind, when that he hath seized them in his strong teeth, and hath come to their lair, and taketh their tender life away—and the hind, even if she chance to be near at hand, cannot help them, for on herself too cometh dread terror, and swiftly she speedeth through the thick coppice and the woodland, hasting and sweating before the onslaught of the mighty beast—even so not one of the Trojans did avail to save them from their bane."<sup>1</sup> Similes are to be found in profusion in the *Mahābhārata* : and figures taken from wild beasts, as in the Homeric example just quoted, are very common.<sup>2</sup> There are ambitious similes too, but they are not on the Homeric line, for they do not deviate from the points of comparison. A good example would be ix, 24, 49-50 : "The vast hostile army was a terrible forest of bows. Darts were its prickles ; maces and bludgeons were its paths ; cars and elephants were its huge trees ; and the cavalry and infantry were its creepers." Such a simile is no doubt extravagant ; but it tries to find out resemblances between two objects at various points ; this is not the only instance of its kind.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes again we have a succession of similes,<sup>4</sup> the same object being likened to various things, one after another.

Extravagant similes are not uncommon and sometimes they are quite short ones, the point of comparison being rather far-fetched. We may take vi, 86, 89 : "The mace crushed it (the chariot) and fell on the ground like a blazing

<sup>1</sup> Lang, Leaf and Myers' translation.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Mbh.* vi, 111, 8 ; vii, 132, 24 ; viii, 66, 29 ; 67, 13 ; 79, 32 ; 89, 2, 4, 9 ; vi, 53, 31 ; 59, 90 ; 61, 2 ; 92, 0 ; 110, 17, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. e.g. viii, 70, 1-5.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. vii, 1, 23 ff. ; 49, 16 ff., etc. Cf. *Il.* ii, 455 ff.

and fierce meteor dropping down from the skies." Or again, in vi, 80, 35: "The mighty car-warrior hurled a great dart blazing like a fiery meteor." With such an extravagant simile we may compare *Iliad*, ii, 455 ff., where the gleam of armour is likened to a "ravaging fire" kindling "a boundless forest". Or we may take Finn, 35 ff.: "A gleam arose from the swords as though Finn's fortress were all on fire." With these again we may compare *Mbh.* viii, 80, 18: "As on a night a blazing forest of bamboos burns on a great mountain, so the great army appeared on fire from Arjuna's shots."<sup>1</sup>

It is very common for Homeric similes to be derived from hunting scenes and a good example would be *Il.* xv, 272 ff.: "As when hounds and country-folk pursue a horned stag or a wild goat, and it is saved by a precipitous rock or shady wood and they cannot succeed in finding it, but at their clamour a bearded lion has shown himself on the way, etc." Although similes are not so common in Teutonic heroic poems, we get pictures of hunting in various connections,<sup>2</sup> and an interest in hunting seems to have been a ruling passion in the Heroic Age, an interest the narrator of the heroic stories was careful to bring out. In Indian heroic poetry the narrator probably did not have the same interest in hunting; and hence hunting similes are rather rare in the *Mahābhārata*. We get a few instances, however, and we may take viii, 80, 26: "They distressed Arjuna with fiery arrows even as hunters do the elephant"; or viii, 56, 99: "These two angry heroes . . . moved about like two elephants excited at the claps of hunters in a deep forest"; or vii, 49, 15: "The heroic warrior slain by the Kurus appeared beautiful like a wild elephant slain by the hunter"; and a passage in the second Book seems to confirm what Aelian says—that lions were hunted with dogs: "As a pack of dogs bark all together at a sleeping lion, so do all the rulers" etc. (ii, 40, 7). Deer-hunting was perhaps more common, as a detailed description in iii, 192, 39 ff. tends to show.

So long we have been examining some common characteristics relating to style; and even these sometimes,

<sup>1</sup> Forest-fire similes are quite common in *Mbh.* Cf. vi, 103, 7; 106, 13; 107, 11; 18, 11, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Beo.*, 1369 ff.

as in the case of the interest in hunting, seem to point to important features in the life of the age. But there are common passages of a different kind, passages which have a deeper significance. Thus, for example, the thirst for fame seems to have been a predominant characteristic of the heroes. It is in the prospect of undying fame that Achilles finds consolation in *Il.* ix: "If I abide here and besiege the Trojan's city, then my returning home is taken from me; but my fame shall be imperishable. But if I go home to my native land, my high fame is taken from me." The same thirst is prominent in Hektor's speech to Aias (*Il.* vii, 85 ff.) and Agamemnon's description of the honours paid to Achilles (*Od.* xxiv, 80 ff.). In both instances a splendid grave-mound on the sea-shore is thought to be a fitting memorial to a dead hero, as such a monument will be seen from afar and remind people of the worth of the hero. The same idea comes out in Beowulf's desire for "a splendid grave-chamber where the head-land juts into the sea" (*Bco.* 2802 ff.). The prospect of glory is put before Waldhere to induce him to fight: "In this hour, champion of Attila, let not thy prowess yield, thy knightly courage fail. Now is the day come when thou, son of Aelfhere, must lose thy life, or else win lasting glory among men"<sup>1</sup> (*Wald.* A. 8 ff.).

With these we may compare *Mbh.* ix, 5, 29: "Fame is all that one should acquire here. That fame can be acquired by battle and by no other means." Death on the battle-field is always regarded as the fitting end of the Kṣatriya; but the prospect of fame through such a death is not always brought out. On the contrary, the chief gain derived from such a death is often said to be eternal happiness in the next world. Thus we may take ix, 3, 53: "Death on the field of battle while fighting in accordance with the custom of the Kṣatriyas, is welcome. Undergoing such a death a person enjoys eternal happiness in the other world." We get similar sentiments in viii, 93, 56, 59; ix, 5, 39; 19, 59-60; vii, 195, etc. The two sentiments are however combined in Karṇa's speech (iii, 299, 31 ff.): "I long for fame even through the sacrifice of my life. Men having renown attain to heaven and those without it are lost. . . In the next world fame leads men to supreme bliss and in this it prolongs life . . .

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Dickens' translation.

Performing impossible feats in battle I shall sacrifice my life and through conquering my enemies I shall win fame alone . . . I shall win great renown in this world and have access to the highest heaven ; and this I have set my mind on that I shall preserve my good name at the sacrifice of my life." Again xi, 2, 14 is very much to the point : " He who is slain in battle attains to heaven and who slays his enemy acquires fame "—so that in either case fighting is for the good of the warrior. An apt parallel to these sentiments is found in the song of Roland (ll. 1474 ff.) : " Fated is it certainly that we should all perish ere long, and it may be that we should never more behold the sunrise. But of one thing can I stand a surety for you. To you shall be accorded the blessed realms of heaven ; there shall ye have your seats among the saints."

Some of these passages emphasize the inevitableness of death ; and this idea is closely associated with a fatalism on the part of the heroes, an emphasis on Destiny as ruling the course of human events. Again and again, we come across the idea in Homer. Thus *Il.* vi, 486 ff. has : " No man against my fate shall hurl me to Hades ; only Destiny, I ween, no man hath escaped, be he coward or be he valiant." Or xvi, 845 ff. : " But me have ruinous Fate and the son of Leto slain . . . Verily thou thyself art not long to live, but already doth Death stand hard by thee ; and strong Fate."<sup>1</sup> *Od.* vii, 196 ff. speak of Fate and the spinning women who settle the destinies of men ; and this latter idea is very common in Teutonic story. The most significant treatment of the idea is found in the Saga of Nornagesti (Cap. ii) and we get it also in the *Gylfaginning* and *Helgakvitha Hundingsbana*, while it is fully handled in the *Darratharljóth*. The idea of an over-ruling Fate is not absent from Russian heroic legend and we have a good instance in the story of Svyatoger. He meets a superhuman being and asks him if he may know the fate that is decreed for him. He is asked to go to a smith in the mountains, one who forges the fates of men. In the story of Diuk Stepanovich, he refused to fight with Ilya of Murom, for the latter's death is not decreed to be in battle.

The *Mahābhārata* repeatedly emphasizes the force of

<sup>1</sup> Lang, Leaf and Myers' translation.

Destiny. "Human effort can never overcome Destiny" (vi, 124)<sup>1</sup> and in a moment of dejection one goes even so far as to say "I think Destiny is more powerful than exertion . . . Of the two Destiny is certainly the more mighty; and exertion is of no avail" (vii, 9). Ordinarily Destiny is thought all-powerful; but man should not desist from personal endeavour. Death or doom may be fixed beforehand by the "high gods"; but the hero's aim is:

"The day of deeds to accomplish and the gathering in of fame."<sup>2</sup>

Fame then is the objective and the heroes are not ashamed to boast of their deeds and to proclaim them in public. Thus Hektor exults over the dying Patroklos (*Il.* xvi, 880 ff.): "Surely thou saidst that thou wouldst sack my town, and from Trojan women take away the day of freedom, and bring them in ships to thine own dear country; fool! nay, in front of these were the swift horses of Hektor straining their speed for the fight; and myself in wielding the spear excel among the war-loving Trojans, even I who ward from them the day of Destiny."<sup>3</sup> Again Diomedes thus addressed Paris (xi, 388 ff.): "Feeble is the dart of craven man and worthless. In other wise from my hand, yea, if it do but touch, the sharp shaft flieth, and straightway layeth low its man, and torn are the cheeks of his wife and fatherless his children." So again the disguised Apollo taunts Aineias (in *Bk.* xx) with his futile boasts.

In the Finn-fragment (24 ff.) Sigferth boasts of his deeds and his lineage: "Sigferth is my name; I am prince of the Secgan, known as a rover far and wide. Many a hardship, many a fierce battle have I endured. Yet to thee is either lot assured that thou wilt seek at my hands." Beowulf's boast in 636 ff. is slightly different; he expresses his determination to perform a deed of knightly prowess or meet his death in the attempt. The Russian heroes, too, seem to have been given to bragging of their valour and we may take the following passage in the story of Dunaï Ivanovich: "All was merry at the feast when the guests began their brags. One vaunted his good steed and one his youthful

<sup>1</sup> Cf. vi, 122, 9; vii, 1, 18; ix, 24, 17, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Morris's *Sigurd the Volsung*.

<sup>3</sup> Lang, Leaf and Myers' translation.

prowess, this knight his sharp sword and that his deeds of might.”<sup>1</sup> The Serb heroes are not more modest. When Alil-Aga, the Sultan’s man, meets Marko, he says: “Fair knight, come, loose thine arrows, thou vauntest thyself for a good knight of prowess; thou didst boast in the Sultan’s divan how with an arrow thou mayst smite the eagle-bird, even the eagle that leadeth the clouds.” Elsewhere Philip the Magyar boasts thus: “Brothers, ye see white Karlovatz; now there are thirty and three towers therein. I have garnished each with a head, save only the tower on the bridge, and that I shall presently garnish with the head of Kraljević Marko.”<sup>2</sup>

The French heroes, too, could boast as well as any others. Thus Roland says to Oliver before his last fight: “Many a mighty blow will I first strike with Durendal. Soon shall the blade thereof be stained with blood. To their ruin have the heathen made this journey to our borders, for I swear upon my troth that they all are damned to death . . . When on every side the fight is fiercely raging, then will I strike a thousand blows with my sword and seven hundred more. With blood will I stain my sword Durendal. And the Franks shall fight with valour, and it please God; but those of Spain can nothing save from death.”<sup>3</sup>

The Indian heroes were not behindhand in bragging. When Abhimanyu sees Duḥśāsana before him on the battle-field, he taunts him with his misdeeds and says (vii, 40): “To-day in the presence of all these warriors I will chastise you with my arrows. To-day I will relieve myself of the weight of anger I bear against you as also from the debt I owe to my parents and uncles who ever desire your death. To-day in battle I will repay the debt I owe to Bhīma. This day you shall not leave with your life, provided you do not abandon the fight.” So in viii, 40, 5 ff. Karna vaunts his prowess and skill and appears confident of slaying Arjuna. He has a special arrow which can penetrate the mountains, and he will not discharge that arrow against any but Arjuna or Kṛṣṇa, and such warriors as he can kill single-banded. Another hero, Śalya, is equally confident: “When angered I can fight

<sup>1</sup> Hapgood’s translation, p. 27, of *Epic Songs of Russia*.

<sup>2</sup> Low’s translation of the *Ballads of Marko*.

<sup>3</sup> Crosland’s translation of the *Song of Roland*, ll. 1067 ff.



with the whole world consisting of the celestials, Asuras and men. I will defeat the assembled Pārthas and Somakas in battle . . . Let the world behold me moving about fearlessly on the field . . . Let the Pārthas etc. witness the strength of my arms and the precious weapons I possess" (ix, 7). So again in v, 163, Bhīma boasts of his strength and is confident of slaying single-handed all Kuru heroes. It is true that Aśvatthāmā says in vii, 196: "An Ārya (or noble person) should not sound his own praises."<sup>1</sup> But it has been pointed out that no warrior excels Aśvatthāmā in actual boasting.

This feeling of pride is thus quite common in the heroes and often it is as much the pride of individual prowess as of noble lineage. Thus before they start fighting Aineias speaks to Achilles about their respective families: "We know each other's race and lineage in that we have heard the fame proclaimed by mortal men, but never hast thou set eyes on my parents or I on thine. Thou, they say, art son of noble Peleus and of Thetis of the fair tresses, the daughter of the sea: the sire I boast is Anchises, great of heart, and my mother is Aphrodite . . . If thou wilt, learn also this, that thou mayest know our lineage, known to full many men: First Zeus the Cloud-gatherer begat Dardanos; . . . then Dardanos begat a son, king Erichthonios . . . Erichthonios begat Tros, . . . and Tros Ilios and Assarkos . . . Assarkos begat Kapys, Kapys Anchises and Anchises me" (*Il.* xx, 200 ff.). With this introduction of himself as of illustrious descent we may compare Idomencus' proud speech to Deiphobos in *Iliad* xiii, 448 ff.

The Indian practice is shown in *Mbh.* i, 138, 31 ff. When Karna challenges Arjuna to a single fight, the latter's friend, Kṛpa, wants to know Karna's lineage: "This is the son of Pāṇḍu, the youngest child of Kuntī; he is a Kuru and will engage in a single combat with you. But O mighty-armed hero, you too should tell us of your ancestry, the lineage of your father and mother and the royal family of which you are an ornament. Arjuna will decide whether he will fight with you only after hearing of your family, for the sons of great kings never engage in a duel with men of inferior descent."

<sup>1</sup> Āryeṇa hi na vaktavyā kadācit stutir ātmanah.

The feeling of pride in one's family is also clearly shown when it is threatened with extinction and Beowulf's farewell speech to Wiglaf (2814 ff.) brings it out : "Thou art the last remnant of our house, even of Waegmund's line. All my kinsmen in their knightly prowess has Fate swept off to their doom. I myself must follow them."<sup>1</sup> With this Professor Chadwick compares<sup>2</sup> *Od.* xiv, 180 ff. where Eumaios fears the fate of Odysseus on his return home : "Now the lordly wooers lie in wait for him on his way home, that the race of godlike Arkesios may perish nameless out of Ithaka."

In the *Mahābhārata* the necessity of the continuance of a family is given a spiritual point, for the memorial offerings of sons are necessary for the salvation of ancestors. This point may well be an interpolation of post-heroic times, and there are many such things which depart from heroic standards. Thus Yudhiṣṭhira distressed at the havoc Bhīṣma was making among his troops, asked for Kṛṣṇa's advice, saying : "I prize life very much ; and it is dear and scarce to be obtained. If I can save it now, I shall spend the rest of it in the performance of excellent deeds of piety" (vi, 108, 23). Such a confession is surely unworthy of a truly heroic figure ; and in actual fighting Yudhiṣṭhira is not much better. Thus when he was in a difficult position in his fight with Droṇa, he quickly ascended Sahadeva's chariot and fled from the battle-field, being borne away by the fleetest steeds (vii, 106). Again, he fares no better in his fight with Kṛtavarma (vii, 165) : He was no match for the latter in feats of arms ; deprived of his armour and his car, he had to make good his escape from the battle-field. In vii, 20, he is sorely afraid of being captured by Droṇa, and Dhṛṣṭadyumna has to assure him that he need have no fears. In the fight that follows Satyajit loses his life in trying to defend Yudhiṣṭhira, who escapes from the field of battle, "borne away speedily by his fleet steeds" (21, 57).

There are other unheroic elements too. One is the great interest taken in the Brāhmaṇas in what we have called the Prologue and the Epilogue. Thus in ii, 46, full details are given of the arrival of Vyāsa at Yudhiṣṭhira's court and of his reception there ; and in the first book there are whole episodes about Brāhmaṇa sages and their disciples. Then there is the

<sup>1</sup> Professor Chadwick's translation.

<sup>2</sup> *Heroic Age*, p. 328.

interest taken by the narrator in all kinds of subtle intellectual disputations, full details of which are given. Thus in i, 161 ff. we hear of the argument between the Brāhmaṇa, his wife and his daughter as to who amongst them should be offered as a sacrifice to the monster. In i, 202 ff. there is a long argument on a different matter. Occasionally, there is too great an emphasis on what passes in the minds of the characters, rather than on how they act; and we are given a full account of their thoughts and feelings, as in iii, 73, 8-15. Sometimes very important events are slurred over with indifference; for example, Aśvimeṣa's marriage with Uttarā with its assemblage of princes is described in only a few verses. The elaborate descriptions of Nature in i, 70 etc. have already been referred to; and the Śakuntalā episode is definitely literary. Even in descriptions of battle there is a tendency to vagueness, and very often after the preliminary stages have been described there is a pell-mell fight, an account of which is always on conventional lines.<sup>1</sup> We might expect a greater distinctness in accounts of duels; but even there we are often disappointed, for we have a vague description as in iv, 13, 23 ff. or in 22, 53 ff.

Still it seems to me that in spite of some departures from the heroic standards and from forms of heroic composition, we can claim the central part of our epic as of the same family as the *Iliad* or *Beowulf*. The style is similar and the sentiments are mostly the same. The interest of all these works is in the deeds of individuals and not in the fortunes of nations or tribes. It is true that the chief prince of our epic, Yudhiṣṭhira, is not sufficiently heroic; but then Paris in the *Iliad* is as bad and we may compare the fight of Yudhiṣṭhira and Droṇa (vii, 20 and 106) or of Yudhiṣṭhira and Kṛtavarma (vii, 165) with that of Paris and Menelaos in the *Iliad*, Bk. iii.

With the *Rāmāyaṇa* we are on a different plane. There is no heroic nucleus as in the *Mahābhārata* and even if we omit the first and the last Book, the story takes up a considerable length of time. As a consequence there is not the same fullness of detail nor the same wealth of episodes. Minstrelsy or oral transmission is not prominent at all; and the story proceeds in the regular narrative fashion, not in the form of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. vi, 46, 2, etc.; 54, 13; 80, 57 ff.; 83, 25 ff.; 91, 79 ff.; 94, 20 ff.; 107, 23 ff., etc.

questions and answers, as so often in the *Mahābhārata*. The style too has often the elaborate ornamentation of later times and we have high-flown descriptions of natural surroundings as in the Śakuntalā-episode of the *Mahābhārata*.<sup>1</sup> The interest of the story is, it is true, in the fortunes of individuals; but in the fight the contending parties represent different races as well, for the contest between the monkeys and Rākṣasas is probably one between two races of a lower stage of civilization, one of which being aided by the more cultured inhabitants of the north wins the victory. We cannot here discuss if this fight has a deep historical significance; but surely the human interest in it is very small. The descriptions of fighting have not the same appeal as in the *Mahābhārata*; for not only is the method of warfare often very primitive but the accounts are generally much more vague than even in the *Mahābhārata*.

Again, in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, speeches take up a much smaller portion of the whole, and even though there are occasionally expressions of heroic sentiments,<sup>2</sup> the lust of glory and the passion for war are markedly absent. The atmosphere of semi-savage heroism which is for us one of the chief attractions of the *Mahābhārata* has here given place to one of sophisticated sentimentality. In place of expressions of undaunted courage and of defiance of even the gods we have helpless lamentations and pious moralizings from the hero. Faced with disaster, he does not show us the burning passion for vengeance, but wastes his time in weak complaints and religious reflections.

All this is far removed from the "heroic" plane; even though the *Rāmāyaṇa* does not have the didactic overgrowth of the *Mahābhārata*, it seems the product of an age of polish and culture, quite distinct from the "barbarism" of the Heroic Age. The personality of the poet is well-defined, he is a creature of flesh and blood, not an abstraction like Vyāsa. He has tried to reproduce the atmosphere of the heroic past; he has taken his characters from old heroic legend and attempted to make them act according to heroic standards. But his heroes are animated with the ideas and sentiments of his own age and these do not at all harmonize

<sup>1</sup> We may take a passage like *Rām.* iv, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. for example the bragging in vi, 90.

with the deeds of blood they perform. It is as with Virgil's Aeneas or Tennyson's Arthur : when the hero slays one of his opponents, it looks very much like murder. The impression produced by the whole work is one of artifice, of what we have called a " literary " as opposed to the authentic epic—of what the Sanskrit critic would call a " Kāvya " as opposed to the " Itihāsa-Purāṇa ".

## CHAPTER VI

### UNHISTORICAL ELEMENTS IN HEROIC POETRY

IN discussing the history of minstrelsy,<sup>1</sup> we have had occasion to show that heroic poetry started with bardic songs about events almost contemporaneous. The historic basis was there, but the imagination of successive generations of bards played on it and added elements which can by no means be termed historical. Such elements are present in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, in *Beowulf* and the *Cuchulain Saga*, in the ballads of Marko and Ilya of Murom, in the *Völsung* story and the *Mahābhārata*; but their presence cannot be made a ground for denying the ultimate historicity of the stories. Thus Professor Chambers, while denying the historical existence of *Beowulf*, acknowledges that we cannot "disqualify *Beowulf* forthwith because he slew a dragon. Several unimpeachable historical persons have done this: so sober an authority as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* assures us that fiery dragons were flying in Northumbria as late as A.D. 793".<sup>2</sup> So again Olrik points out that dragons appear in many stories about historical persons, persons whose historicity is beyond all doubt. The Sagas of Ragnarr Lothbrók, of Ketil haeng and of Sivard digri, are cases in point. The Icelandic poet Björn Hítðáelakappi is said to have slain a dragon, when sailing on one of King Canute's ships; and monster-slaying is mentioned as an achievement in the *Njálssaga*.<sup>3</sup>

These unhistorical elements may appear in the heroic poems in many forms, one of the commonest being the introduction of gods and goddesses who play an active part in the story. The reasons for such an introduction are easily understood. The heroes are taken to be superhuman, superior to the race of average men; and they can quite conceivably

<sup>1</sup> In the chapter on "Early Indian Minstrelsy and Heroic Poetry", pp. 49 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Chambers' *Beowulf*, p. 11. For an examination of Chambers' arguments, see note at the end, p. 112.

<sup>3</sup> Olrik, *The Heroic Legends of Denmark*, Hollander's translation, pp. 474 ff.

be the rivals of divinities. The gods come down to strive with them and the heroes prove their mettle by fighting every inch of ground ; ultimately they come off no worse than the gods. Such combats alone can conclusively prove the super-human vigour of the heroes. Hence, to the primitive bard, the introduction of divinities seems an essential element of heroic stories.

Thus in the Homeric combats, the gods often take a leading part, fighting for their favourites. In the *Iliad*, Bk. v, Aphrodite and Ares came down to help the Trojans and are both wounded by Diomedes ; and in Book iii, Aphrodite rescues Paris from the hands of Menelaos. These instances must be distinguished from those of Books viii and xiv, where the heroes gain the victory through the aid of gods not taking an active part in the fray. Such instances do not tend to magnify the prowess of the heroes but rather depreciate their valour, for their victory is explained away as due to the overruling will of gods. These may be cited as instances of the religiosity of the poet, but not of his hero-worship.

In Northern heroic stories and stories of the Viking Age <sup>1</sup> Othin sometimes takes an active part in fights—the most noteworthy instance being perhaps in Saxo's account of the battle at Bravalla. There Othin disguises himself in the shape of a confidential servant of Harald Hilditonn, to lure him on to his ruin—an incident which we may compare with Athene's behaviour to Hektor in *Il.* xxii, 226 ff. In the *Völsunga Saga*, Sigmundr receives his sword from Othin, and in his last battle the sword is shattered at the touch of Othin's javelin. So again Othin chooses Sigurthr's horse for him and accompanies him on his expedition against the sons of Hundigr. But a much more striking instance of the intervention of divinities is to be found in the account of a strictly historical event,

<sup>1</sup> In these stories the gods are introduced in the following ways :—

(1) In representations of gatherings in heavenly regions. *Eiríksmál*, *Hákonarmál*. Cf. Vita S. Ansharii (ch. 23)—all of these with reference to events almost contemporary.

(2) Gods mingle with men :—

(a) In disguised form, e.g. at Bravalla, etc.

(b) In true form : *Hákon* and *Thorgerthr*.

(c) In conjugal relations : *Hynduljóð* and *Saga of Olaf Tryggvason* (ch. 173).

(3) Men ready to attack gods : (*Biarkamál*).

(4) Squabbles and cheating among gods : Winnile's story in *Origo Gentis Langobardorum*.

Earl Hákon's battle against the Jómsvíkingar in A.D. 994. The Jómsvíkinga Saga tells us that the battle was at first going against Earl Hákon. But he then invoked the help of his goddess, Thorgerthr, who immediately appeared with her sister, Irpa, to help him and the battle was decided in his favour.

We may, however, have contests between gods and men in spheres other than of war. They may appear as rivals of the heroes for the love of earthly maidens, and sometimes be worsted. Thus in Saxo's story of Baldr, who is there at least a demi-god, he appears as the rival of an earthly king, Hotherus, for the love of Nanna; in the fight which ensues, Baldr is worsted. We may also remember the Irish story of Eochaid Airem and Mider. The former, a high king of Ireland, had for his wife Etain who was loved by the god, Mider. The latter defeated the king at a game of chess, claimed the queen according to the conditions laid down before the game and ultimately carried her off.<sup>1</sup>

In the *Mahābhārata* we find gods playing all these different parts; we find them fighting with men or ruling the fates of men or sharing in the loves of men. First, to take an instance of a hero's fight with a god, we may recall Arjuna's contest with Indra in i, 229. We are not exactly certain whether Indra hurled his dreaded thunderbolt against Arjuna<sup>2</sup>; but he sent down a shower of stones which Arjuna repelled. He then tore up a large peak of the Mandāra hills with trees and all else upon it, and dashed it against Arjuna, again with no avail, for Arjuna's arrow tore the peak into fragments. Some of the other gods<sup>3</sup> joined hands with Indra; but Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa were a match for the whole band. After the conclusion of the fight Indra showed his generosity by praising Arjuna for his prowess, and telling him to seek for a boon. Arjuna prayed for his weapons.

This was not Arjuna's only fight with the gods. iii, 39

<sup>1</sup> Hull's *Text-book of Irish Literature* (1906), pt. i, pp. 16, 83-4.

<sup>2</sup> Vv. 29-30 tell us that he did *hurl* it; but v. 31 seems to contradict it, and we do not hear anything more about it, which would suggest that it was not hurled. Moreover, the shower of stones would be an anticlimax after the thunderbolt.

<sup>3</sup> The list of gods is curious reading: Sūrya, Mitra, and Savitā are mentioned separately with different weapons; but one does not know how to distinguish them. So again with Yama and Mṛtyu. Varuṇa, the Aśvins, and Tvastṛ, however, present no difficulties.



tells us of his encounter with Śiva ; but we must note that the tone of the story is not exactly the same as in the one just referred to. For one thing, there is a feeling of exaggerated reverence for the god in this episode—a feeling entirely absent from the story of the encounter with Indra. This feeling of reverence naturally tells against any excessive glorification of the hero, who is represented as fighting in ignorance of the divinity of his antagonist. As a matter of fact, when he is nearly getting the worst of the fight, he begins to worship Śiva, hoping to gain victory thereby, and then comes to know that his opponent is the god himself. All this is not in the note of superhuman—even super-divine—heroism that we are accustomed to in heroic poetry.<sup>1</sup>

The Nala story shows us gods desirous of winning an earthly maiden for wife. iii, 44 ff. narrate how Damayantī wished to have Nala for her husband and to that end caused her father to announce that she would choose a husband at a formal *svayamvara* (ceremony of free choice). The gods Indra, Agni, Yama, and Varuṇa all wanted to win her and went to the ceremony, and even made Nala promise to help them. Damayantī, however, would choose none but Nala. But when she came out before the assembled princes, she found to her dismay several of them with the form and features of Nala, for the gods had all taken up that guise. She had to invoke their compassion by relating the story of her love and the gods were at last persuaded to put on their proper forms, so that Damayantī could choose her Nala.

We come across a similar situation in iii, 123 which describes how the two gods, the Aśvins, saw Sukanyā, the daughter of King Śaryāti, and fell in love with her. She was already married—to a sage, Cyavana—and her loyalty to her husband prevented her accepting the love of the gods. She managed to persuade the gods to renew the youth of her husband, though after his magic bath she was placed in the same predicament as Damayantī, for her husband had acquired the form and features of the Aśvins, and it was only with difficulty that she could identify him.

<sup>1</sup> It is curious that the episode with the genuinely heroic note introduces the Vedic supreme god, Indra, whereas the one we may call pseudo-heroic glorifies one of the later triad, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva.

It is needless to go into instances where gods appear to adjust the fates of men, for these are common enough. Like Yama in the *Sāvitri*-story they are introduced very often in this character, which, of course, must be the most natural for them. They may be persuaded by the entreaties of men and women, but human efforts are of no avail against them. As has been pointed out, this is not strictly in harmony with heroic ideals and perhaps reflects the religiosity of a later age. Much more consistent with heroic tradition is the belief which would introduce them as the parents of the mighty princes. This is common in Greek and Irish tradition: Achilles is the son of Thetis, Acneas of Aphrodite, Sarpedon of Zeus, Cuchulain of Lug.<sup>1</sup> In our main story all the heroic brothers are regarded as of divine origin. Yudhiṣṭhira is the son of Dharma, the god of justice, Bhīma of Vāyu, the wind-god, Arjuna of Indra, Nakula and Sahadeva of the two Aśvins. This attribution of divine origin is natural in an attempt to glorify the prowess of the heroes, for their strength has a touch of the divinity in it. Such an attempt at glorification is found in the case of heroes of historical times as well and we may remember the case of Alexandros who was looked on as the son of Zeus.

But gods are not the only supernatural beings introduced into heroic tales: we have supernatural beings of another type—demons, giants, dragons. The parts, however, which deal with such creatures, are an intrusion of the "folk-tale" into heroic stories. Folk-tales are sometimes classed under "folk-sagas" and "Märchen", the former dealing solely with supernatural beings with definite names, attached to definite places.<sup>2</sup> These we shall have to consider later as "Myths" and here we are concerned only with the "Märchen"; we take the term to refer to stories of almost universal diffusion, having variants in all parts of the globe. These deal with anonymous characters; and the leading figures are described as "the man", "the woman", etc., or by some common name like Jack or Hans, or "by a name

<sup>1</sup> The story of Othin and his son in Saxo is not very much to our point.

<sup>2</sup> See MacCulloch's *Childhood of Fiction*, pp. 430 ff. But it is very doubtful if "folk-sagas" should be taken in this sense alone. It is more common to use the phrase for any current unwritten story dealing with definite personalities (real or not). When the saga treats of real personages, they come outside the purview of this chapter. When dealing with supernatural beings of a definite personality they would come under "Myths".

which is obviously made up to suit his or her special circumstances or characteristics, such as Aschenbrödel or Sneewitchen".<sup>1</sup>

We have elsewhere<sup>2</sup> discussed the common characteristics of heroic poetry and noted the following features. The main characters are persons of noble birth; the opponents of the hero are generally treated with sympathy; there is a tendency to avoid the coarse and the horrible; and the poet delights to dwell on detailed descriptions of court life and etiquette. The folk-tale presents a sharp contrast on all these points: some of the main figures are of humble origin; the enemies of the hero or heroine are made up of cruelty and vice; the coarse and the horrible are not avoided; the narrator is ignorant of court details; and the manners reflected in the tales are "not of the court, but of the village".

Folk-tales often make their way into heroic poetry; and we have examples both in Teutonic and Greek heroic poetry. Thus Panzer discovered<sup>3</sup> about two hundred variants of the Grendel-story, current in different parts of Europe and Asia, attention being drawn to these elements from remarkable similarities between this tale and the adventures of an Icelandic hero, Grettir, and those of another Icclander, Ormr. The dragon-fights of Sigurthr, Frothi and Beowulf himself have similarly been found to have folk-tale elements in them. It has been pointed out that the killing of a monster which is a pest to the land, and which at the same time guards a large treasure, has been the main achievement of numerous heroes. The folk-tales in Homer are to be mainly found in Odysseus' story of his adventures narrated in Alkinoos' court (*Od.* ix-xii). The tales of Polyphemos and the Laistrygoncs introduce widespread stories of cannibalistic monsters, that of Kirke brings in a narrative of transformation equally popular in all parts of the world, while the visits to Aiolos, the journey to Hades, the singing of the Sirens, and the slaughter of sacred animals introduce equally well-known folk-tales.

<sup>1</sup> Chadwick's *Heroic Age*, p. 110. Professor Chadwick points out that most of the stories dealing with gods would in origin come under this category as well, for the gods often bear descriptive names, e.g. Thunor, Frig, Balder, Frey.

<sup>2</sup> See Ch. V.

<sup>3</sup> *Studien zur germanischen Sagengeschichte*, 1, Beowulf.

We may point out folk-tale elements in the heroic stories of other nations. The Russian heroic stories teem with them ; and it is difficult to find a single episode which does not have at least some of these elements. Thus the story of Dobrynya and Marina introduces another variant of the "transformation" legend ; that of Dunaï Ivanovitch brings in the good-natured but rather stupid giant who woos a princess for his lord and gains a beautiful bride himself ; that of Dobrynya and Alyosha is another folk-tale about the hero who stayed too long away from his home but returned in time to prevent his friend's supplanting him with his bride.<sup>1</sup>

There are similar folk-tale elements in the *Mahābhārata* as well, and many of Bhīma's adventures are but variants of such stories. Let us take one of the most striking of these from i, 159 ff. The Pāṇḍavas with their mother, Kuntī, were living in disguise at Ekacakra in the house of a Brāhmaṇa ; and one day Kuntī discovered the householder weeping in the company of his wife and daughter. She found out that the city was terrorized by a monster who had made it a condition with the inhabitants that they should supply him with one human being a day to be eaten by him. The people supplied him by turns and the next day it was this householder's duty to send the person. Kuntī persuaded them to allow Bhīma to go in place of one of them—the daughter perhaps—and Bhīma killed the monster, after a desperate fight, when he came to consume his prey.

This is but a variant of Herakles' <sup>2</sup> adventure in rescuing Laomedon's daughter, Hesione, from a devastating dragon <sup>3</sup> ; while Perseus' deliverance of Andromeda is not very different. So there is an Avar story about the hero's rescue of a king's daughter from a dragon to whom a maiden had to be offered annually. A Senegambian ballad makes the dragon a lion, who is slain by Samba, the hero.<sup>4</sup> In the Arabian tale the Sultan of Yemen's son delivers a princess from a dragon

<sup>1</sup> This last story may not necessarily be a folk-tale. It is found no doubt in different parts of the world ; but such an adventure may have been quite common in a particular stage of society everywhere.

<sup>2</sup> It is curious that Bhīma should resemble Herakles in so many ways. The favourite weapon of both is a club ; and both depend on the power of muscles to get the better of the enemy. Bhīma often finishes off his foe with his hard grip, just as Beowulf does.

<sup>3</sup> Diodorus Siculus, iv, 42.

<sup>4</sup> Béranger-Féraud's *Contes*, p. 41 ; MacCulloch's *Childhood of Fiction*, p. 888.

to whom she was offered ; and there are Japanese, Irish, and Esthonian parallels to this. In the Japanese story the hero immediately marries the rescued maiden ; but the other heroes go away and pass through various adventures before coming back to marry the girl. It is rarely that the adventure ends tragically ; but Béranger-Féraud tells the story of Phorloë, the daughter of a King of Latium, who was rescued from a monster demanding the annual victim ; the rescuer, however, lost his life in the attempt.

Bhīma's adventure with another ogre, Hiḍimba, also contains folk-tale elements. The fight is carried on without the help of weapons and it is ended through Bhīma's getting a grip of the monster and breaking his back. The incident of the ogre's sister taking the form of a beautiful maiden to attract Bhīma has its parallel in numerous folk-tales. There is the Bengal tale of a wandering Brāhmaṇa who was welcomed by a beautiful woman as her long-lost husband. She was really an ogress who had devoured all the people of the land.<sup>1</sup> A Siamese story relates the misfortune of a king who was unfortunate enough to marry such a wife, and similar stories are current all over India. In all these, however, the ogress ultimately manifests her cannibalistic nature, while in Bhīma's case she seems to have reformed for good.

In the original stories from which the cannibal tales come, it is quite possible that the ogre was merely an uncivilized barbarian of another tribe, a non-Aryan in the Mahābhārata stories. This barbarian would naturally be regarded as a monster and one of the main tasks of the cultured invader would be to repel the onslaughts of the more ferocious original inhabitants who, failing in open fight, would attempt to carry on sporadic depredations. Once they got a few isolated enemies in their power they would act as Polyphemos or Hiḍimba wanted to do. Thus one of the achievements of the Aryan hero would be to get rid of as many of these pests as possible, and many folk-tales of ogre-slaying would be attached to the famous warrior.<sup>2</sup>

Some of Bhīma's other adventures too seem to be borrowed

<sup>1</sup> Day's *Folk-Tales of Bengal*; cf. the story of Rāma and Rāvaṇa's sister in *Mbh.* (iii) and Rāmāyaṇa.

<sup>2</sup> For variants of cannibal stories, see MacCulloch, ch. 10.

from folk-tales: among others we may mention his forced journey to the nether regions (i, 128). Folk-tales have not clung to other heroes to the same extent. But one or two cases may be mentioned. We have already referred to the story of Rāvaṇa's sister; but a more curious story is that of Kalmāṣapada, a king who suddenly lapses into the customs of the savage past and resumes cannibalistic activities. The story is apparently made up of two versions; in the one his lapse is due to his whipping a Ṛṣi (Sage), in the other to his supplying a Brāhmaṇa with human flesh. Whatever the reason may be, such lapses into savagery are not unknown in other parts of the world and similar stories may be cited from various countries.<sup>1</sup>

Another famous folk-tale is that of Purūravas and Urvaśī.<sup>2</sup> Urvaśī, a beautiful nymph, consented to marry Purūravas, an ancestor of the Pāṇḍavas, on condition that he must never allow her to see him naked; she disappeared as soon as he violated the condition. This is a variant of the story of Cupid and Psyche, which has its parallel among the Eskimos,<sup>3</sup> among the Indians of the Amazon,<sup>4</sup> and the Australians, and probably reflects some old taboo by which the husband and the wife were forbidden to see each other.

Among the various features of these folk-tales we must notice the tendency to introduce supernatural beings other than gods, the giants, ogres, and fay-nymphs figuring largely in the list; and Hidimba, Vaka, Menakā (in the Śakuntalā story) and Urvaśī—the two last-named being parallels to creatures like Eidothee or Kirke or Kalypso—all come under that head. The rākṣasas of the Rāma-story are most difficult to place and Rāma's fight with the inhabitants of Laṅkā (Ceylon) has been taken to reflect history. It has been held that Rāma's allies, the monkeys, and his enemies, the rākṣasas, simply represent the earlier non-Aryan inhabitants of India, who, being on a lower scale of civilization, are referred to contemptuously as other than human. We have seen that some of Bhīma's adventures may also be explained on the same lines; but there is a

<sup>1</sup> MacCulloch, ch. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Referred to vaguely in *Rg-Veda* (x, 95), it is related in a connected way in Śat-Brā. Handled most fully in Kālidāsa's famous drama, *Vikramorvaśī*.

<sup>3</sup> Rink's *Tales and Traditions of the Eskimo*, pp. 236 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Hart's *Amazonian Tortoise Myths*, p. 40.

difference. Stories of encounters with individuals can scarcely be regarded as history, especially when similar stories are current all over the world. But a long drawn-out war such as Rāma waged with his enemies may very well represent a distinct historical event.

In this connection we must also notice demi-gods and evil spirits who play a part in the destinies of men. Kali, in the Nala-story, is a spirit of this type. Bent on doing Nala mischief, he is on the look-out for any slip on his part; as soon as he sees one, he enters his body and "possesses" him. It is through his instigations that Nala is led to play at dice with Puṣkara and loses everything, the dice always going against him through the unseen interposition of Dvāpara, an attendant of Kali.<sup>1</sup> Kali possesses Nala even after the loss of his kingdom and all his property, and leads him to forsake his devoted wife, Damayanti; he is expelled only through the good services of a creature whom Nala has benefited.<sup>2</sup>

But sometimes supernatural powers are ascribed to men and no supernatural beings may be introduced. Such powers would account for Odysseus' journey to Hades and his holding converse with the dead. Such powers, again, enabled Sigurthr to understand the language of the birds, who warned him about Reginn's treachery and enabled him to pass the barrier of fire to the castle where Brynhildr was sleeping.<sup>3</sup> Similar powers were possessed by some heroes of episodes in the Indian epic. Foremost among these is Śukra, the preceptor of the Asuras, the opponents of the gods. Śukra had the power of reviving dead men through his magic incantations—a power supposed to be possessed by many heroes of stories of magic. One is reminded of the powers of Hildr in the Norse version of the Hethinn-Högni tale and of Medea's craft in renewing the youth of her father-in-law. Thor, of course, has this power, but then he was a god; it is not quite clear whether Śukra is to be taken as semi-divine or not. His daughter is, however, married to

<sup>1</sup> Dvāpara and Kali are the names of the evil ages of the world, the earlier and happier ages having been the Satya and Tretā.

<sup>2</sup> The evil spirits of historical persons, too, are sometimes represented. A noteworthy instance is in the story about Charles Martel, representing the spirit of the dead prince as a dragon. See Chadwick, *H.A.*, p. 127.

<sup>3</sup> *Völsunga Saga*, chs. 19-20. This is another folk-tale—that of the Sleeping Beauty—current all over the world.

a famous king, an ancestor of the Pāṇḍavas, and except for his magical lore Śukra seems to be an ordinary man. Stories of resuscitation through magic are found in Japan, among the American Indians, in Lorraine, in Kashmir, Bengal, New Guinea, indeed, everywhere. (See Chamberlain, "*Koji-ki*," p. 70, etc.; Petitot's "*Indian Traditions*"; Cosquin's "*Contes Populaires de Lorraine*," ii, 5, etc.; Day's "*Folk-Tales of Bengal*," p. 81; Knowles' "*Folk-tales of Kashmir*," etc.)

In other instances too, supernatural powers are ascribed to men. Yayāti was cursed with decrepitude, but he could transfer his weakness to any one of his sons who was willing to endure it and give his own vigour to his father. Puru, his youngest son, consented to do this, and Yayāti enjoyed youth for a long time after this and could, when he was satiated with the joys of life, re-transfer his youth to his son.<sup>1</sup> Many of the Brāhmin sages too are represented as having wonderful powers: Śaktri could convert a king into a cannibal (i, 178); Cyavana could control all the activities of a whole army (iii, 122); Vasiṣṭha was no less powerful (i, 179, etc.). Many of Bhīma's achievements, again, border on the supernatural (i, 150, etc.); but perhaps they are better described as exaggerations of the probable.

Such exaggerations are common in all heroic poems, being due to a natural desire to magnify the prowess of the heroes. Even in Homer, who is perhaps the sanest in this respect, the mighty leaders slay the ordinary soldiers by the hundred. So did Agamemnon in his fury: "And as when ruinous fire falleth on dense woodland, and the whirling wind beareth it everywhere, and the thickets fall utterly before it, being smitten by the onset of fire, even so beneath Agamemnon son of Atreus fell the heads of the Trojans as they fled" (*Il.* xi, 155 ff.). So again Patroklos in *Il.* xvi, and Achilles in *Il.* xx; and such prodigies of valour are not quite so improbable as they would seem at first sight, for much better equipped with arms, both offensive and defensive, as the hero was, he could do what he liked with the ordinary soldier opposing him.

Less probable perhaps are the deeds of some Teutonic

<sup>1</sup> This may be a "popular" tale; one variant is attributed to the Moghul king, Bābar, and his son, Humāyun.



heroes : the story of Sigmundr and Sinfjötli (*Völ. Saga*, ch. 7 ff.) often goes beyond the marvellous ; the account of Atli's slaying of the Giukings is at best an exaggeration of the probable (ch. 37-8). But in the story of Hygelac's death, the description of Beowulf's swimming across the sea with thirty-one suits of armour on his arm seems really fantastic—much more so than his swim with Grendel's head and the magic sword (*Beo.*, ll. 2361-2 and 1618 ff.).

In the Irish stories the exaggeration often becomes grotesque, and most of Cuchulain's adventures cannot be reconciled with any degree of probability. The Russian stories are not more rational in this respect ; we may think of the story of Ilya and Nightingale, of Dunaï and the Tatars of Volga and his early adventures. The Serbian stories follow the same vein ; we may remember many of the marvellous deeds of Marko. Take, for example, his rescue of the three Serb warriors from General Vuča. He first slays the three hundred horsemen sent against him and then fights against the whole army of Vuča. "His sabre was in his right hand, in his left his battle-spear, in his teeth the bridle ; whomsoever Marko smote with his sabre was made two instead of one : . . . And when he had turned him about once again, the troop of horsemen went to the devil ! " <sup>1</sup> And most of Marko's other adventures follow these lines. The Spanish hero, the Cid, is not behindhand with his exploits. The Moorish King, Miramamolūn, came against him with fifty thousand horsemen, and the Cid had only a few followers. But he dashed against them in all his fury and "his arms up to the shoulder with Moorish blood were red". "To every Moor who met him He gave a single stroke ; Their ranks before his charger In wild disorder broke." <sup>2</sup>

The Indian heroic stories are given to exaggerations as much as any of these ; the effect is often grotesque, more so even than in the Irish stories. Some of Bhīma's wonderful deeds have already been referred to ; and in his case, an explanation of his enormous strength is given in the epic (i, 128). When the boy Bhīma was poisoned and thrown into the waters, he sank down and was taken to Vāsuki, the king of the snakes. Vāsuki asked him to drink off a vessel

<sup>1</sup> Low's translation of the Ballads of Marko, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> Gibson's translation of the Cid Ballads, Rom., 59.

of divine juice which could confer enormous strength on the drinker. Bhīma finished off eight such vessels, and acquired wonderful might from doing so. After this, feats of muscular strength, as performed against Kirmira in iii, 11, seem natural to him.

But Bhīma is not the only one who performs these prodigies of valour. Paraśurāma exterminates all the Kṣatriyas not once, but many times. Ghaṭotkaca is killed while flying in the air and in his fall crushes a whole legion of soldiers; but his mother was the ogress, Hidimbā, and anything is possible for the offspring of Hidimbā and Bhīma. Pradyumna does wonders against Śalya (iii, 20); Bhīṣma can vanquish hundreds of princes single-handed (v, 173). When the Kuru host was carrying off Virāṭa's cattle, Arjuna routed them practically unaided (iv, 45 ff.). Attacked by the great Kaurava warriors on all sides, Arjuna is pierced by hundreds of arrows, but remains unmoved (vi, 52). So again in vi, 89, Arjuna wounds Bhīṣma with a thousand shafts without any appreciable effect.

In speaking of numbers the poet rarely considers the limits of reason. Bhīṣma slays a hundred thousand warriors in ten days (vi, 13); and in one part of the Pāṇḍava army "there stood a hundred thousand warriors in front, a hundred millions at the back and a hundred and seventy thousand on the sides" (vi, 50). iii, 232, tells us about the supporters of Rāma against Rāvaṇa: Suśeṇa came with ten billion of followers and "the terrible-looking Gavākṣa with six hundred billions"; "the celebrated Gandhamādana came with a hundred thousand crores" and the intelligent Panasa with hundreds of millions.

Such exaggerations are no exceptions, but form the general rule. One has to get used to them in the Indian epic, for at times it is difficult to get behind these exaggerations and think of a substratum of fact underlying them. The grotesqueness and improbability of some parts of the stories may lead us to reject the whole as imaginary; but as has been pointed out, we must always guard ourselves against such an assumption.

The question remains whether all heroic stories were ultimately based on fact, or whether some were mythical in origin. A few Teutonic stories—those of Weland, of

Hethinn, and Högni and of Sigurthr—have been sometimes held to be ultimately myths.<sup>1</sup> The story of Weland is said to be the myth of a fire-demon; that of Hildr and Hethinn a myth of “unceasing strife between conflicting powers”; that of Sigurthr and Brynhildr a “myth of light and darkness”. But it has been pointed out<sup>2</sup> that these suppositions are not based on a thorough examination of the different versions of the stories. Thus the end of the Weland story—Weland rising into the air and flying away—is supposed to point most clearly to a fire-myth; but this feature is present only in the Norse version. So again the endless battle at the conclusion of the Hildr-story is a feature of only the Northern version, which we have no right to regard as the oldest element of the story, and the interpretation of Hild (War) as a Valkyrie is doubtful.<sup>3</sup> In the Sigurthr-story too the name “Niflungar” is wrongly taken to be connected with “nifl” (mist), the word being really “Hniflungar” and not “Niflungar”. The evidence again for regarding Sigurthr, Brynhildr, and Högni as mythical figures is at best weak.

In the Homeric stories, Achilles as the son of a deity is supposed to be mythical; but it has been pointed out that many historical princes claimed divine descent, the presence of Woden (or Odin) in Teutonic genealogies being quite common. The story of the abduction of Helen has been regarded as a myth, from a fancied connection with sun and moon stories. The theory of tribal myths in the Homeric poems brings in too complex a problem for examination here; but it seems certain that it does not rest on a safer foundation than the other imagined myths.<sup>4</sup>

Mythical interpretations of the main story of the *Mahābhārata* too have been attempted. Thus Ludwig took the Pāṇḍava story to be a sun and earth myth. Kṛṣṇā, the dark one, was taken to be the earth, the Pāṇḍavas, the seasons, possessing her in turn. Kṛṣṇa is interpreted as the sun, even though he has the same name as Draupadī; but the

<sup>1</sup> I shall not attempt to define “myth”; but it may be described as “what I do not believe but other people do”.

<sup>2</sup> Chadwick's *Heroic Age*, pp. 182 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Professor Chadwick points out that half the feminine names in Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry contain the element “hild”.

<sup>4</sup> See Chadwick's *Heroic Age*, pp. 267 ff.

theory is open to more serious objections, and is altogether unconvincing. It is mainly due to the desire to explain away the custom of polyandry and the idea that all popular stories of the far past—heroic or non-heroic—are nature myths, even though the reconstructed story may be very different from the actual one. But, as we have already seen, there are more than reasonable grounds for taking the Pāṇḍava story as historical in origin<sup>1</sup>; and we shall attempt to show later that polyandry may be explained through certain social usages of the time.<sup>2</sup>

But a mythical character has been attributed to some episodes on other grounds. The characters in the Kaca and Devayāni story are all semi-divine, and hence it is taken to be a myth. But we have already seen that Kaca's adventures while a disciple of Śukra are at least partly a folk-tale of the revival of the dead; and we may add that most of the characters in the story bear descriptive names. In the sequel of the story—in the account of the later adventures of Devayāni—the semi-divine nature of the characters is hardly brought out, Śukra appearing just as the priest of an ordinary king, while Yayāti has no pretensions to divinity.

If there is still some ground for regarding the Devayāni story as mythical in origin, there is none at all for making the Pāṇḍava story a myth by taking Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna as the two gods Viṣṇu and Indra anthropomorphized. Some sort of divinity is certainly attributed to Kṛṣṇa throughout the story and the value of his help to the Pāṇḍavas is always emphasized. But he does not generally work for the victory of the Pāṇḍavas by exercising any divine powers; all that Arjuna gains from him is some shrewd advice which Kṛṣṇa as his charioteer is always at hand to give. Arjuna is connected with him by marriage—he has married Kṛṣṇa's sister—and that makes Kṛṣṇa's help all the more natural. Towards the end of the story (xvi, 4) Kṛṣṇa meets the fate of ordinary princes, being struck down by old age (personified as Jarā) and death. Thus, even if he is to be taken as the incarnation of Viṣṇu, in our story he is an earthly king, wiser perhaps than all his contemporaries and hence to be

<sup>1</sup> In the chapter "The Chronology of the Heroic Age" and elsewhere.

<sup>2</sup> See Chs. VII and VIII, pp. 120 ff., etc.

placed on a higher level. After all, this attribution of divine nature to a great earthly king is not very uncommon<sup>1</sup>; we have no right to take our story as one of the divine Viṣṇu and not the earthly Kṛṣṇa.

If there is small ground for taking the Kṛṣṇa of the heroic story as the god Viṣṇu, there is less for regarding Arjuna as Indra. It is true he is regarded as Indra's son; but as has been pointed out, the attribution of a divine parentage does not disprove his historicity or make him mythical. He is a great warrior, wonderfully skilful in archery, partly as the result of careful training by Droṇa in his childhood. But he has a strong rival in Karna, and in the final fight of the two it is doubtful whether Arjuna would have been the victor had he not taken an unknighly advantage of an accident to his rival. He is a hero—a great one—but with the hero's defects; and it is a distortion of the story to hold him up as a god, such a distortion being only possible through a superimposition of religious elements on the heroic story, the conversion of the Bhārata tale into a dharmaśāstra.

Of course, there are episodes in which all the characters are gods or demons; and the Sunda-Upasunda story (i, 209–212) is a good example. These *dānavas* (superhuman enemies of gods) had become too powerful, and the gods feared an extinction of their powers from the encroachments of these two. Then Viśvakarmā, the smith-god, fashioned a woman, made up of the essence of beauty, and tempted the two *dānavas* with her love; and the two were killed fighting about her.

This and similar stories, e.g. that of Skanda in iii, 224 ff., are certainly myths, introducing practically no human figures.<sup>2</sup> A different kind of myth is seen in the attempted explanation of natural phenomena, e.g. in the story of Rāhu in i, 19, with its explanation of eclipses (cf. however the account of xii, 348). vii, 53 supplies an account of the origin of death, and i, 179, explains the names of certain rivers; while the story of churning the ocean (i, 18, etc.) accounts for the origin of various material and immaterial objects.

There is one story in the first book which may be taken

<sup>1</sup> The further discussion of the problem of incarnation is postponed till we come to discuss "Religion in the Heroic Age of India".

<sup>2</sup> Skanda is the son of six mothers, like Heimdall, the son of nine mothers, in the Norse story.

either as a myth or as an exaggeration of the probable. The famous quarrel of Vasiṣṭha and Viśvāmitra began over the possession of a magic cow with wonderful powers. With a community of people, whose chief treasure was cattle, such a quarrel would be perfectly natural and we may remember the cattle raid story of Book iv. But this cow is no ordinary animal and it is perhaps possible to find a myth in the story.<sup>1</sup>

The question of myth-making leads us on to that of creative fiction in the heroic poems. Following Aristotle we may say that poetry is never the same as history, that it "is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history; for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular".<sup>2</sup> In other words, the imagination of the poet is never content merely to record facts, it must seek to idealize them, to make them as they ought to be rather than as they are. This implies a certain amount of fiction in all poetry—even in poems based on fact, in poetical accounts of events like the Battle of Maldon or the Battle of Brunanburh. Heroic poems, dealing as they often do with the more distant and the less definitely known past, are bound to contain a larger amount of fiction. Now this fiction may imply the invention of whole stories, including the creation of new characters. Or it may involve no more than changes in the structure of stories, mistakes in history, and the inclusion of mythical and folk-tale elements. So far as the Teutonic heroic poems go, there is no conclusive evidence for the composition of wholly fictitious narratives or the deliberate invention of characters.<sup>3</sup> The influence of fiction "was shown chiefly in the imaginative presentation or structure of stories, some of which were founded on fact, others on popular report or rumour which frequently introduced elements from folk-tales, occasionally even from myth. All such cases however, may be included among the 'things that may have happened', if we take into account the spirit of the times".<sup>4</sup>

With the Greek heroic poems we are on less sure ground because of the absence of historical evidence; and many scholars, like Jebb, have held the Homeric tale of Troy

<sup>1</sup> We may compare the Tain story of the Cuchulain Saga.

<sup>2</sup> Butcher's translation.

<sup>3</sup> Unferth and Widsith may be inventions; Sunilda Hamthir, Sörl, Wiglaf are more doubtful.

<sup>4</sup> Chadwick's *H.A.*, p. 186.

to be "essentially a poetic creation". The question, however, arises whether we are right in postulating such a development of the inventive faculty in these early times. There can be no doubt that the ancient Greeks, including Thucydides and Herodotus, considered the Homeric heroes as real men and believed the events to be based on fact. Are we justified in rejecting this opinion, especially when the heroic poems of other parts of Europe support it? If we wish to do so, we have to prove that they are fictitious. It cannot be said that such proof has been forthcoming; and it seems reasonable to assume "that the use of fiction must have been confined within certain limits". When the poet's courtly hearers were sufficiently familiar with the facts on which his poem was based, they would tolerate only a limited manipulation of them. They would object to a radical perversion of tradition, such, for example, as would involve the introduction of heroes from quite different cycles into the same story. This may have been possible in what we have called<sup>1</sup> Stage IV of heroic poetry, but not in Stage II, to which the poems under consideration belong.

Most of these arguments hold true of Indian heroic poetry as well. The inhabitants of ancient India regarded the heroic characters as real—not simply the composers of the *Purāṇas* but even perhaps sober grammarians like Pāṇini.<sup>2</sup> Of historians unfortunately there were none; but we have elsewhere found it possible to reconstruct history from the *Purāṇas* and even to establish the chronology of the Heroic Age. People who consider the heroic stories as wholly fictitious have here, as elsewhere, the burden of proof on them; they have to prove their hypothesis about such a high development of the inventive faculty among the early Hindus. They have not supplied the proof; and we may accept the basis of fact, rejecting palpable instances of fiction and obvious mistakes in history.

There are certainly plain cases of creative fiction: we may think of the stories brought forward to justify the Pāṇḍavas' polyandry (i, 199, etc.). It is difficult to regard the story of the five Indras as a pure myth; it seems to be a story made up to support the special case of the five brothers.

<sup>1</sup> In the discussion of Early Minstrelsy.

<sup>2</sup> One wishes his references to Vasudeva, Arjuna, and Yudhiṣṭhira (iv, 3, 98; viii, 3, 95, etc.) were more definite.

So again in the story of Tapatī and Saṃvaraṇa (i, 173 ff.) one does not know how much of fiction is mixed up with the myth. Saṃvaraṇa sees the nymph, Tapatī, and falls in love with her; but she disappeared immediately and for a time the king was as disconsolate as Freyr for Gerthr, or as Mider the Irish god for the loss of Etain. On seeing the king's state, Vasiṣṭha, the king's priest, went to the nymph's father, the sun-god, and managed to secure his permission for his daughter's marriage with the King.<sup>1</sup>

In these cases, as in other stories dealing with the far past, the invention of the poet colours old myths or folk-tales. It is doubtful if he ever made up a whole story or created creatures of flesh and blood out of his imagination.<sup>2</sup> In his treatment of the main stories, he may introduce fictitious details or pervert the order of facts; but he is never purely a "Maker". Nevertheless, his work belongs to a stage of heroic tradition different from that of Beowulf or Homer. The Anglo-Saxon bard might bring the same person into contact with heroes of different ages; but he would not introduce these heroes as actors in the same story. Thus Widsith is said to know Eormenric, Guthere, and Alboin; but he has not brought them into contact with one another in the same legend. The Indian poet can do this and bring princes of different ages into touch with one another. Thus Paraśurāma is made to fight with Bhīṣma (*Mbh.* v, 178 ff., etc.), and with Rāma Dāśarathi (*Mbh.* iii, 99, and *Rāma.* i, 74 ff.), though if the evidence of genealogies is to be trusted, he belonged to a much earlier generation.<sup>3</sup> So again Droṇa is said to visit Paraśurāma (*Mbh.* i, 180), and Karna, like Bhīṣma, is said to have learnt the use of arms from him (viii, 84). As there were often kings with the same name belonging to different ages, they are confused with one another and history is curiously perverted. A very good example is the case of the two Śukas, discussed by Mr. Pargiter (*A.I.H.T.*, pp. 64-5). The story of Utaṅka in xiv, 53-8 is full of historical absurdities and many of the Śānti-Parva stories are no better.

<sup>1</sup> Pargiter suggests that the story has a historical background—that history has been here mythologized. See *Ancient Indian Historical Traditions*, p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> Personifications of abstract qualities or anthropomorphizing of the gods must obviously be left out of account.

<sup>3</sup> See Pargiter's *Ancient Indian Historical Tradition*, pp. 265 ff., 144 ff., etc.



But in many of these cases the mistakes may not be the results of a deliberate exercise of the creative powers of the poet. They may be due to a confusion of tradition owing to the lapse of ages ; or they may be due to the Brāhmanical bard's lack of interest in the accurate presentation of the past, in the deeds of the heroes of bygone ages ; and the lack of historical sense in the hearers would co-operate. Some critics have, however, held that these bards occasionally manipulated the events of the story deliberately, changing the characters of actors of the old tale, introducing new figures in the leading rôle . Of this type a very good example is the "inversion" theory of Schroeder and Holtzmann referred to elsewhere<sup>1</sup> ; and we may repeat what we pointed out there—that the inconsistencies and contradictions which led to the invention of the "inversion"-theory may be explained in other ways from the analogy of Western Heroic poetry.

We must conclude by emphasizing a point referred to often enough : the fate of Indian heroic stories has been different from that of Teutonic or Greek ones mainly in that in later times the heroic poems were varnished over with religious sentiment ; the dead heroes were given a sacred nature and the story of their deeds was regarded as part of the scriptures. So the difficulty in detecting the historical basis has been doubled, for not only have the usual unhistorical elements of legend been introduced, but the whole spirit of the narrative has been changed, its interest being no longer in the straightforward account of the deeds of prowess, of the "gathering-in of fame", but in the advancement of some religious cults, some theological dogmas. While the Brāhmaṇa bard is busy with his hair-splitting discussions, his moral treatises, his ethical discourses, the heroic narrative is left in the background, and what is worse, sometimes mishandled to point a moral or glorify a priest. It is difficult to call these elements unhistorical, for they have nothing to do with history. They have come and imposed themselves on heroic tradition ; and it is difficult to liberate it from their clutches, to get back the "Bhārati-Kathā" from the present *dharma-sāstra*.

<sup>1</sup> See ch. II, p. 25.

To recapitulate : The unhistorical elements may be classed under the following heads :—

- (1) The introduction of gods.
- (2) Folk-tale elements, including :—
  - (a) Supernatural beings other than gods.
  - (b) Gross exaggerations of the probable, including the ascribing of supernatural powers to men.
- (3) Myth.
- (4) Creative fiction, with which is allied,
- (5) Mistakes in history.

## NOTE

### CHAMBERS ON THE HISTORICITY OF "BEOWULF"

Professor Chambers, in his latest work on *Beowulf*,<sup>1</sup> has adduced several reasons for denying historical existence to *Beowulf* :—

(1) In the accounts of Scandinavian kings, whether written in Norse or Latin, there is no mention of a name corresponding to *Beowulf*, King of the Geatas.

(2) *Beowulf*'s name does not alliterate with that of the Geatish kings, *Hrethel*, *Herebeald*, *Haethcyn*, *Hygelac*, nor with that of *Ecgtheow*.

(3) There is always something extravagant and unreal about his deeds, e.g. his swimming home with thirty suits of armour.

(4) He did not immediately attempt to avenge the death of his lord, the young prince, *Heardred*.

(5) *Bothvar*, who has been identified with *Beowulf*, is not regarded as king of Geatas.

(6) If *Beowulf* had a successful reign of fifty years, why should the kingdom be in confusion on his death?

If we take these arguments individually, they may all be rebutted :—

(1) Mr. Chambers himself points out that this argument does not mean much "when we consider how little, outside *Beowulf*, we know of the Geatish Kingdom at all". Ptolemy and Procopius mention the *Gautoi*, but have nothing about any of their kings, nor has *Jordanes* who talks about the *Visigauti*. Gregory and the *Gesta Regum Francorum* mention *Hygelac*, but not as a king of the Geatas.

(2) It is true that in the Heroic Age names of one royal family often alliterated with one another, perhaps because it helped the introduction of the names into alliterative heroic poetry. But the rule was no universal one; and if we went on it we should have to deny the historical existence of *Sigismund*, the son of *Gundobad* of Burgundy (whose family had mostly "G-" names), or of *Gontran*, the son of *Clothair* (whose house specialized in "C-" or "Th-"). *Beowulf* again was only the daughter's son of *Hrethel*, and *Ecgtheow*'s family, not being the rulers of the land, would not be expected to follow the alliterative rule rigidly.

(3) *Beowulf*'s marvellous deeds follow the usual lines of achievements of heroic princes. We have tried to point out how common these exaggerations are in heroic poetry; the attribution of extravagant deeds to *Beowulf* should not invalidate his historicity any more than that of many a prince of history. Thus if we take the case of *Hygelac*, who is generally accepted as a historical figure, we read the following account of him in the "*Liber Monstrorum*", a collection of mediaeval texts: "Of tremendous stature was king *Huiglaucus* (or *Huncglaucus*) who ruled over the *Getae* and was slain by the *Franks*. At the age of 12, no horse could carry him; and his bones rest on an island at the mouth of the *Rhine*, and are shown as a wonder to visitors from afar." And this, we must understand, is not from a heroic poem, where poetic exaggerations are all too probable.

<sup>1</sup> *Beowulf: An Introduction*, pp. 10 ff.

(4) It is true that the tie which bound the *comitatus* to the lord was very strong in the Heroic Age; and we may remember the historical instance of Chonodomarius, the king of the Alamauni,<sup>1</sup> and in later times of Cynewulf, the Wessex king. But if we are to take Mr. Chambers' rendering of the "Ethics of the blood-feud", we may well understand Beowulf's inaction after the slaying of Heardred. As Mr. Chambers puts it: "It happens not infrequently that after some battle in which a great chief has been killed, his retainers are offered quarter and accept it; but I do not remember any instance of their doing this if, instead of an open battle, it is a case of treacherous attack."<sup>2</sup> We have no reason to suppose that Heardred was slain treacherously. He was apparently defeated and killed in an open fight; and Beowulf probably accepted the quarter offered by the victor. Of course, he would bear no good will towards Onela and would be looking out for an opportunity of vengeance. Such an opportunity may have been offered in later times when Eadgils claimed the Swedish throne against Onela.

(5) The fact that Bothvar is not regarded as king of the Geatas is no strong argument, for after all, the identification of Bothvar and Beowulf is problematic. It is quite possible that in late documents like *Hrolfs Saga* or Saxo's *History*, the adventures of more than one hero have been foisted on Bothvar; at any rate they may not have described all the achievements of the hero, being interested mainly in his relations with the Danish king. The king of the Geatas may quite well have died fighting for his ally, Hrolfr Kraki, for obviously the account of his death in a dragon fight is not historical.

(6) In the Heroic Age, prosperity and stability of the kingdom depended solely on the rule of a strong king. The king was the all-important figure; and however prosperous the state of the kingdom might be under him, if he died without leaving an able, grown-up son, everything would be in immediate confusion; the fall of the kingdom would not be far off. Thus Theodric the Ostrogoth died in 526, after a prosperous rule of over thirty years, and the Ostrogothic kingdom was destroyed in 553. Gaiseric the Vandal died in 477, after a successful reign of fifty years, and the Vandal kingdom vanished in 534. Gundobad of Burgundy died in 516, after a reign of about forty years, and the Burgundians were subjugated in 534. So it does not seem very unnatural that the Geatish kingdom would be in danger on the sudden death of a childless king.

Thus we may say that individually these arguments do not come to much; but certainly they have a cumulative effect and one feels sceptical of accepting the *fifty years'* reign of Beowulf, though he may have been the ruler of the Geatas for a time.

<sup>1</sup> *Amianus*, xvi, 12, 60.

<sup>2</sup> *Beowulf: An Introduction*, p. 277.

## CHAPTER VII

### SOCIETY IN THE HEROIC AGE OF INDIA

#### I

#### *Kinship and Social Classes*

WE have discussed parallelisms in the growth and development of a particular type of poetry in different parts of Europe and in India. We have found similarities in subject-matter—not merely in outline but in details as well. We have, moreover, discovered that the poems were generally based on fact and that they were originally composed by people with first-hand information of the events and social conditions they were talking about. Thus the similarities we have discussed so far would lead us to expect a similarity in the social conditions of the period described.

In a discussion of this society, one has to notice that in most of the poems it is an age of youth, not in the sense of youthfulness of social organization, of primitive forms of human endeavour, but in the domination of the old by the young, the weak by the strong. Strength of muscles and skill in arms imply leadership in society, and youthful precocity is very much in evidence in the immaturity of the leaders, so far as age goes. It is not as in modern warfare, where the leader of men must be a bronzed veteran marked more by his experience of men and the world than by his personal valour. The result of the great battle of modern times depends on the clash of armies as a whole. Even if we neglect the part played by artillery and the latest scientific inventions, the fate of the battle cannot be said to depend on individual heroism but on collective bravery. The general is not called upon to perform marvellous feats of arms or display extraordinary muscular strength; his skill lies in guiding the movements and manœuvres of masses of soldiers. The acquisition of this skill is generally a matter of time and experience and the youthful commander of armies is an exceptional figure.

In the period we are discussing, however, the issue of warfare depends on the personal bravery of vigorous young men, ambitious of fame, confident of prowess, proud and boastful, but fatalists about the overruling powers of Destiny.<sup>1</sup> We notice this youthfulness as much in Beowulf, the slayer of Grendel, as in Achilles or Sigurthr or Dobrynya or Marko. At the reception held in Beowulf's honour, he is seated in the midst of the youthful warriors, the "gioguth", Hrethric and Hrothmund and the sons of warriors, the "hceletha bearn". He is the "hyse" whom Hrothgar thinks of adopting as his son (Beo. ll. 1175, 946 ff., etc.), and on whom Wealhtheo relies for the protection of her young sons (ll. 1226-7). Dobrynya is always the "young" Dobrynya, be it in his encounter with Alyosha<sup>2</sup> or with the Dragon of the Cavern,<sup>3</sup> or in his effort to win back Nastasya.<sup>4</sup> The youthfulness of Achilles is emphasized as much during his quarrel with Agamemnon<sup>5</sup> as in the prognostications of his early death.<sup>6</sup> The chief heroes of the Indian epic are not all equally youthful. As a matter of fact if we accept the *Mahābhārata* estimate of the age of the heroes as strictly accurate, Arjuna and Karna, Duryodhana and Bhīma, would be well advanced in years, while Bhīṣma and Droṇa would be quite old at the time of the great battle. Arjuna is supposed to have lived in banishment for twenty-five years—once for twelve and again for thirteen; the length of this period must be taken to be highly exaggerated. Nevertheless, with his son, Abhimanyu, taking part in the war as a prominent hero, Arjuna could not have been quite young at the time; Duryodhana, Karna and Bhīma were all as old as he. Still, the fact that Abhimanyu and Ghaṭotkaca are almost as distinguished as Arjuna or Bhīma is very instructive. Abhimanyu, described as a "mere boy" in vii, 51, 12, and as a "child in years" in 52, 4, was strong enough to discomfit most of his enemies and was slain only through an unfair fight, several warriors directing

<sup>1</sup> See the discussion of "The Common Characteristics of Heroic Poetry", pp. 70 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Story of Dobrynya and the Pavilion: Hapgood's *Epic Songs of Russia*, pp. 96 ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Dobrynya and the Dragon*, Hapgood, pp. 140 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Hapgood, pp. 193 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. for example ll. ix, 138 ff., where Agamemnon is ready to look on him as a son.

<sup>6</sup> ll. xviii, 55 ff.; 92 ff., etc.

themselves against him at the same time. Ghaṭotkaca was not much older than Abhimanyu and yet made such havoc among his enemies that Karṇa had ultimately to cast his most terrible weapon against him, a weapon which he (Karṇa) had treasured for a long time for utilizing against Arjuna (vii, 176 ff.). If we carried on the Greek parallel we might say that if Bhīṣma corresponds to Nestor in age, Karṇa and Arjuna would correspond to Agamemnon and Odysseus, Abhimanyu and Ghaṭotkaca to Achilles and Patroklos; and in this warfare the youngest often distinguished himself more than the maturest.

This precocity of the heroes in warfare was evident in their more peaceful occupations too, in the sphere of diplomacy and politics, for example. If we trace the strife of the Kauravas with the Pāṇḍavas from its first beginnings, we should see that the plots and conspiracies of the former started when the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Pāṇḍu were barely out of their teens. Arjuna first made his mark as a great warrior by capturing the Pāñcāla king after a fierce fight and he had then just finished his period of education and tutelage. It was shortly after this that Duryodhana formed his first plots for the destruction of the Pāṇḍavas; these plots were countered by the shrewdness as well as the bravery of the youthful Pāṇḍavas. On their marriage with the Pāñcāla princess they felt strong enough to challenge openly the rights of the Kurus; and at the time of their establishing themselves in a new capital they must have been quite young.

One of the most noticeable features of the age we are discussing is, then, the ambition and vigour of youthful heroes; and their strength and violence bring out the weakness of the older ties of clan and kindred—so much so that the bonds of kinship seem on the point of disintegration. Thus there are too many instances of strife amongst relatives both in the Greek and the Teutonic heroic poems.<sup>1</sup> The *Iliad* mentions a good many of such instances: Tlepolemos slew his cousin Likymnios (ii, 662 ff.) and Epeigeus killed a cousin (xvi, 570 ff.). Meleagros seems to have slain his mother's brothers (ix, 566 ff.) and Phoinix came near to

<sup>1</sup> This in spite of what Procopius says in *Goth.* ii, 14, or what *Beowulf* points out (ll. 2441 ff.) about the kinsman's duty of vengeance.

killing his father (v, 456 ff.). Agisthos slew his first cousin, Agamemnon, and the latter's son, Orestes, took vengeance by slaying Agisthos and perhaps his mother Klytaimnestra (*Od.* iv, 520 ff.). The Teutons were no better; and the quarrel in Ougentheow's family led to the death of Onela and Eanmund (*Beo.* 2396, etc.). Unferth, the "spokesman" (thyle) of Hrothgar's court, slew his brothers (*Beo.* 587 and 1167-8); and Eormenric apparently killed his nephews. Numerous instances are found in the historical records too: Clothair, the Frankish prince, is said to have killed his nephews with his own hand and had his son, Chramnus, burnt with his family; Gundobad of Burgundy slew his brother, Chilperic; Cloderic slew his father, Siegbert the Lamé, king of the Rhineland Franks; and Irminfrith the Thuringian slew his brother, Berthari.<sup>1</sup>

This disintegration of the bonds of kinship among the Greeks and Teutons was probably due to a transitional stage in kindred organization; in many of the Greek royal families we find matrilinear relationship gradually giving way before the patrilinear. Kingship often descends in the male line as in the case of Odysseus and Nestor; but Frazer mentions a good many instances of inheritance through the female.<sup>2</sup> Tydeus was a son of Oeneus, king of Kalydon in Aetolia; he migrated to Argos and married the king's daughter. His son, Diomedes, went to Daunian in Italy, where he married the king's daughter and received part of the kingdom. In the *Iliad* (Bk. vi) we hear how Bellerophon, a stranger, won part of the kingdom of Lycia by marrying the king's daughter. Similarly, Menelaos seems to have inherited Sparta from his father-in-law, Tyndareos; and later authorities narrate similar things not only in regard to the house of Pelops—Tantalos, Pelops, Atreus, Agamemnon—but also about Peleus, Telamon, Teukros, etc.

Among the Teutons too, there are some instances of the inheritance of a kingdom through marriage with a woman of the blood-royal. Thus there is Saxo's story<sup>3</sup> of Hermutrude, a legendary queen of Scotland, who yielded

<sup>1</sup> Gregory of Tours' *History of the Franks*, iii, 4, 5, 18, etc.

<sup>2</sup> *Early History of Kingship*, pp. 238 ff. The instances mentioned are mostly matri-local, rather than matri-linear ones.

<sup>3</sup> Bk. iv, p. 126, of Elton's translation.



the kingdom with herself,<sup>1</sup> and Sigurthr, even if he did not acquire a kingdom, seems to have resided at his wife's home. Again the kingdom was sometimes acquired by marrying the last king's widow. This seems to have happened with Aigisthos and Gyges, with Hamlet's uncle, with Feng and his successor, Wiglet. Marriages with the step-mother seem to have been based on the same principle.<sup>2</sup> Thus according to Procopius (*De Bell. Goth.* iv, 20), Hermegisklos, the king of the Warni, left instructions that his son, Radiger, should marry his widow (R's. step-mother) and inherit the kingdom. So the A.S. Chronicle (Ann. 616) says of Eadbold, the Kentish king: He renounced his baptism and followed heathen customs, so that he married his father's widow.<sup>3</sup> So again Ethelbald shocked public opinion by marrying his father's widow, Judith, who had been formally crowned queen at her wedding to the old king, Ethelwulf, and used to sit crowned beside him on state occasions.<sup>4</sup>

When we come to examine the Indian evidence for heroic society we are faced with the difficulty we have had to notice before. Here we possess only very late versions of the heroic stories—versions in which the religious and ethical interest has completely overshadowed the interest of heroic deeds and heroic characters. Everything is viewed from the angle of the priest, and instead of a straightforward narrative we have didactic digressions on the sanctity of the priestly class, the value of virtue, the futility of bravery unsupported by religion, and so on. But if the interference of the priestly bard had ended here, our task would not have been so difficult, for we could have easily separated the chaff from the grain, the clerical moralizing from the heroic tradition. As it is, these late revisers maltreated the traditional stories as well and tried to give a new point to the old tales. They were shifted from their proper centre, the heroic figures were thrust into the background, and moralizing princes dear to the heart of the priest came forward to acquire prominence.

<sup>1</sup> We may compare the case recorded by Tacitus (*Ann.*, xii, 29 ff.) of the king of the Quadi being displaced by two sons of his sister.

<sup>2</sup> One explanation of such a custom may be just provision for the widow.

<sup>3</sup> Lifode on hethenum theawe swa he heafde his fader lafe to wife.

<sup>4</sup> Asser, § 18.

The result is that in an effort to describe the social conditions of the Heroic Age we cannot depend on the direct evidence of the epic, but have often to attempt reconstructions of the old heroic stories. The mass of abstract statements, occurring generally in the didactic parts of the epic, we have to reject or at least check by the concrete events and actions of the plainly heroic episodes. This task is difficult and the difficulty faces us at every turn, as we shall see in this as well as subsequent discussions of the Heroic Age.

Thus we are faced with a serious difficulty when we come to examine the strength of the ties of kinship in the Indian Heroic Age. The main story of the *Mahābhārata* is of the strife of the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas, who are said to be first cousins, and the battle is fought between close relatives, between cousins and cousins, between nephews and uncles. The prominent allies of a protagonist are his relatives by marriage; his bitterest enemies his kinsmen by blood. Thus two of the greatest helpers of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his sons are Dhṛtarāṣṭra's brother-in-law, Śakuni, and his son-in-law, Jayadratha; the best friends of the Pāṇḍavas are their brothers-in-law, Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Śikhaṇḍī, and Kṛṣṇa, and the kings, Virāṭa and Drupada, connected with them by ties of marriage. But the fact that Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Pāṇḍu were brothers did not prevent their sons from being the bitterest of enemies.

Here, however, we are faced with the problem as to how far we can depend on the fact of this relationship between the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas. Did the earliest heroic poems regard Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Pāṇḍu as brothers and Yudhiṣṭhira and Duryodhana as first cousins? In discussing this question we have to take several facts into consideration. First of all, the name, Pāṇḍu, "the pale one," is very curious. There was some peculiarity about his complexion which led to this name, and how can this peculiarity be explained? The story in *Mbh.* i, 106,<sup>1</sup> is very unconvincing; and the suggestion that he had some skin disease, leprosy or something like that, is not very helpful because this defect would probably have prevented him from superseding his elder

<sup>1</sup> It tells us that his mother turned very pale when Vyāsa approached her to raise offspring on her and hence her son had a pale complexion.

brother, who was being passed over on the ground of blindness.<sup>1</sup>

Pāṇḍu as a king is a very shadowy figure, practically no events being recorded of his reign. Next we must note he had no children when he retired from his kingdom. His sons were all born in the Himalayan forests and they are his sons only in theory, their real parents being the gods. After Pāṇḍu's death some ascetics of the forest brought the five boys to Hastināpura and asked Dhṛtarāṣṭra to accept them as his brother's sons. When they had grown up, their claim to part of the kingdom was naturally disputed by Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons and they had to spend some time in exile. In this exile they contracted a polyandrous marriage with the daughter of the Pāñcāla king; and this is another point which throws doubt on their relationship with the Kauravas.

Drupada, the Pāñcāla king, points out that polyandry is against all usage and the rules of the scriptures; and certainly it is never found among the cultured Aryans to whom the Kurus belonged. Can we rely on this to prove that the Pāṇḍavas must have been non-Aryans, belonging to certain northern hill-tribes among whom polyandry is practised even to-day? There are, however, certain facts which have to be considered before we accept this contention. The polyandry the Pāṇḍavas practised was of a peculiar type, one wife being married to five brothers; and is this very different from the custom of "Niyoga", which was certainly in vogue among the Aryan Hindus? In Niyoga sons are begotten with the widow or wife of a childless person, the children being regarded as offspring of the husband; and in many of the old Hindu instances, it is the husband's brother who is asked to beget issue for him with his widow or wife.<sup>2</sup> Thus when Vicitravīrya dies without leaving any children, his mother asks one step-brother of his, Bhīṣma, to beget issue for him with his widows, and when Bhīṣma

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the instance of Devāpi (v, 149) passed over on account of a skin disease. The fact, however, that another son was sought to be raised after Pāṇḍu's birth may support the leprosy-hypothesis.

<sup>2</sup> The custom is probably not unknown in the *R̥gveda*, and we may compare the passage in x, 18, 8, where the widow is asked to rise from the pyre of her dead husband and accept the hand of a new husband, almost certainly the last man's brother.

refuses owing to his promise of celibacy, another step-brother performs the task and the children are regarded as Vicitravīrya's.<sup>1</sup>

The principle here may be that the wife is given not to the individual but to the family, the practice originating either with economic necessity or with the scarcity of women ; and we may try to see such an implication in the disgusting story of Mamatā and Br̥haspati (i, 104). The principle of the Pāṇḍava marriage as of the Pracetasas whose story is cited to defend the Pāṇḍava's conduct may be taken to be the same.<sup>2</sup> After all, however, there is a radical difference between the Niyoga or levirate on the one hand and this particular type of polyandry on the other. The marriage of a woman to several brothers, all living, is essentially different from her marrying them one after the other. For one thing the latter never raises the difficulty of succession and inheritance that the former must do. The order of patrilinear succession could never exist in a society which permitted a woman to have several husbands at the same time. Owing to the difficulties of locating the parentage of the offspring, the matrilinear order would have to be followed.

The difficulty is, of course, obviated to some extent if all the husbands are brothers and the issue may reside at the paternal dwelling and inherit the common family property of the parents.<sup>3</sup> Still, the difficulty must be there in important matters, e.g. in succession to a throne. The *Mahābhārata* recognizes this difficulty and the present version indicates that the common wife lived with each brother for one year, so that her five sons can be assigned to their respective parents. Yet there might have been trouble if these sons had lived on to the time of Yudhiṣṭhira's abdication, as then it might have been difficult to choose the successor. As it is, they were all slain, so that Arjuna's descendants by Subhadrā could inherit the throne.

<sup>1</sup> This story, like all other references to Vyāsa, seems a late addition (see ch. iv). The priestly bards of later ages were probably responsible for the introduction of Vyāsa into the *Mbh.* story.

<sup>2</sup> These stories are certainly late additions of an age when the standard of moral conduct had changed considerably from what it was in the Heroic Age.

<sup>3</sup> We may compare Caesar about the Britons (*De Bell. Gall.*, v, 14) : " Ten or even twelve have wives common to them, and particularly brothers among brothers, and parents among their children ; but if there be any issue by these wives, they are reputed to be the children of those by whom respectively each was first espoused when a virgin."

To return to our main point, however, it seems difficult to regard the Pāṇḍavas as cousins of the Kauravas. The shadowy figure of Pāṇḍu, the birth in the forest, the unknown parentage,<sup>1</sup> the custom of polyandry, all these would go to suggest that the Pāṇḍavas belonged to a different family, probably to a different tribe at a level of culture lower than the Kauravas. The cousinship was probably invented later on by bards singing at the courts of the descendants of the Pāṇḍavas, by poets desirous of glorifying the lineage of their patrons through linking them with the ancient family of the Kuru kings, famous even in Vedic literature.

In estimating the strength of the bonds of kinship then we shall have to leave aside this instance of a strife between cousins and look out for cases where the relationship is not open to similar doubts. In an examination of these ties, the first instance that occurs to us is naturally the Pāṇḍavas; and here at first sight the ties of kinship appear to be very strong. The five brothers seem always very loyal to one another and it is mainly through the prowess of his two brothers that Yudhiṣṭhira can regain his kingdom, while all through in their long exile there is nothing but amity between the brothers. Yet there are some instances which are rather puzzling. Let us take the case of Arjuna's exile in the First Book (chs. 215 ff.).<sup>2</sup> In our present version he is said to go willingly to lead the life of a Brahmacārin (a celibate ascetic) for a number of years. But it is strange asceticism that he practises—entering into marriage relations with princesses wherever he goes! In the first of these episodes, Arjuna refers to his vow of asceticism; but that does not prevent him from accepting the princess. In the second one, he goes to the king of the land and, declaring his lineage, desires the king's daughter in marriage. After having lived with this wife for a time, he journeys to another land where also he falls in love with a princess whom he carries off by force and marries. Obviously this is not the conduct one would expect from a willing ascetic; one suspects that the reasons assigned for Arjuna's exile are not the real reasons. These suspicions are strengthened when we find that Arjuna returns to his land after having married the sister of Kṛṣṇa of

<sup>1</sup> To say that they are the offspring of the gods is, rationally speaking, to admit that their parentage is unknown.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 17-18.

Dvāraka, the most revered of the princes of the time. Such alliances were, as we shall see later on,<sup>1</sup> the great sources of a prince's strength, and it may be that Arjuna could return only after the acquisition of such strength. These facts would seem to suggest that the real reason for Arjuna's banishment was perhaps some quarrel with his elder brother about their relations with the common wife, that he was not a willing exile through the breach of some conditions imposed on such relations, as the epic would suggest (i, 215); and Yndhiṣṭhira's remarks on the death of Draupadī and of each one of his brothers (xvii, 2) would show that he had no great sympathy for the latter and was particularly jealous of Arjuna. There were probably serious quarrels between the Pāṇḍava brothers; but these have perhaps been glossed over by the priestly bard of later times, desirous of holding up the Pāṇḍavas as a pattern of brotherly love.<sup>2</sup>

But there are many better instances of the slackening of the ties of kindred, instances in which we need not depend mainly on conjectures and reconstructions. One of the most striking of these is the story of the destruction of the Vṛṣṇis and Andhakas in xvi, 3. They were all kinsmen and relatives, feasting together while on a journey. The trouble started with one hero taunting another about a cowardly act in the past. Soon it developed into a free fight in which, according to our text, "sons killed their fathers and fathers killed their sons" (3, 41). They went on slaying one another until practically the whole band was destroyed, only three or four being left alive.

On the occasion of the great battle kinsmen, even brothers, fought on opposite sides. After the death of Jarāsandha, the Magadha king, Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍavas placed his son, Sahadeva, on the throne (ii, 24) and naturally he sided with the Pāṇḍavas in the battle (v, 59); but apparently he had a brother Jayatsena, who was not satisfied with the arrangement and sided with the Kurus when his chance came. He must

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter on "Government", pp. 185 ff.

<sup>2</sup> The fact that they helped one another in battle or at the time of exile does not prove much, for common misfortunes have always a tendency to unite even long-standing enemies. Even in the exile, however, it was not all amity between the brothers. Cf. e.g. iii, 33 ff. It is probable that the love and reverence which these brothers undoubtedly had for their mother, helped to keep them together on many occasions. For this reverence for the mother see next chapter, p. 161.

be the king of Magadha mentioned in vi, 17, 18 etc., for he was slain by Abhimanyu (viii, 5).<sup>1</sup>

Again, for an earlier generation we may take the case of Yayāti and his eldest son, Yadu, who was deprived of his rightful inheritance because he had quarrelled with his father (v, 149). This quarrel may have been due to his refusal of an unreasonable request of his father's (i, 85) or to something else ; but as a result of this he was cursed by his father and disowned by him. Much more serious must have been Rāvaṇa's quarrel with Vibhiṣaṇa, as the latter joined Rāma to destroy his own brother (iii, 282 and *Rām.*) and as a reward for his help was given Rāvaṇa's kingdom after his death (iii, 290) ; while we may compare the relations of Sugrīva and Vālī in the same story (iii, 279). Nala's bitterest enemy was his brother, Puṣkara, most of the former's miseries being due to the latter.

It is true that the didactic epic holds up the father as an object of reverence and the brother of love ; but the actual instances often contradict this rule. Even the examples which seem to support the rule are at times quite instructive. The main story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is a case in point : Vālmiki and the poet of *Mbh.* iii, 272 ff. find in Rāma and his brothers types of ideal virtue, devoted to one another and to their father. Yet the main theme of the story rests on the banishment of Rāma by his father, in order to benefit Rāma's younger brother, Bharata, a son of the favourite wife. Rāma's life in exile leads to his other misfortunes which supply the heroic elements of the story. In Vālmiki's story as also in that of the third Book of the *Mahābhārata* we find the old king acting much against his will, so much so that he dies broken-hearted after Rāma's banishment, while Bharata does not at all want to gain the throne through the machinations of his wicked mother. Yet we must remember that these are not the main elements of the story, which is one of Rāma's exile, Rāvaṇa's outrage and Rāma's revenge. The fraternal attachment of Bharata and the paternal love of Daśaratha may well be an addition of a poet living a thousand years after the events of the story, or may be due to a gradual change in the conception of the characters of Daśaratha and Bharata due to these thousand years of oral transmission.

<sup>1</sup> He is mentioned by name in vi, 16.

We have then good grounds for supposing that in the Indian Heroic Age too the ties of kinship and blood had become slack, though in some instances this strife among kinsmen was varnished over by later moralists to suit the standard of virtue of a later age. Now we have to investigate if such strife was merely the usual result of jealousy and ambition or if there were more deep-seated reasons in a change of social ties, in a transitional stage of social organization. Generally we find that the law of succession followed the male line and kingdoms descended from father to son ; but there is evidence that in some cases at least maternal relationships were very strong and matrilinear succession was not unknown. The best instance is perhaps that of Vāhlika (Bālhiika), the second son of Pratipa, Bhīṣma's grandfather. v, 149, tells us that he left his father and brothers and succeeded to the rich kingdom of his mother's brother.<sup>1</sup> Then there is the Maṇipura instance in i, 215, where we are told that the reigning king will be succeeded by his daughter's son and in xiv, 79, we find the latter reigning on the throne of his maternal grandfather.<sup>2</sup> If we regard Arjuna's connection with Ulūpi (i. 214) as a regular marriage, that also furnishes a similar instance, though not quite a satisfactory one, for Ulūpi is not regarded as an ordinary human being and there is no clear indication of matrilinear succession. Much more important from our point of view is the custom of polyandry practised by the Pāṇḍavas. If this custom was common in their tribe, they could only have matrilinear succession for the reasons discussed above ; and in present-day India we find a similar rule of inheritance among the hill-tribes and the South-Indian races which still permit polyandry.

Next we find that in the epic stories and in later literature the mother's brother occupied a very prominent position amongst relatives. If we take the case of the junior Pāṇḍavas, Prativindhya, Sūtasoma and others taking part in the great battle, we find that while their mother's father and mother's brothers were all fighting for them, they had few relatives on

<sup>1</sup> Bālhiiko mātulakulam tyaktvā rājyam samāśritah. Pitṛn bhrātṛn parityajya prāptavān paramṛddhimat.

<sup>2</sup> Of course, it is pointed out in i, 217, that the daughter's son succeeds simply because the king has no son ; but this excuse may be a late addition.



the father's side among their allies.<sup>1</sup> Abhimanyu's mother's brother was the greatest helper of the Pāṇḍavas, just as Duryodhana's mother's brother is one of his most prominent allies. As Hopkins points out (*JAOS.* xiii, p. 141), Śakuni, Duryodhana's maternal uncle, is his bosom-friend, and a constant resident at the royal palace. In a fable (v, 160) the mice want to have a cat for their protector and say: "We have many enemies; so let this one be our maternal uncle and act as our guardian."—Again, in the *Purāṇas*, the maternal uncle is very important: in the list of *gurus* (venerable persons) of the Bṛhannāradiya Pur. (9, 88 ff.) the mother's brother is mentioned but not the father's brother. The Vāyu (ii, 8) says: "A son reveres (*bhajate*) his maternal uncle, a daughter her father." Manu also favours the maternal uncle: He alone is honoured while returning from a journey (iii, 119); and the "only uncle one should not dispute with is the mother's brother" and the mother and maternal relatives are important<sup>2</sup> (iv, 148, 183).

All this evidence may lead us to conclude that one significant feature of Indian heroic society was a transitional stage in kindred organization and probably a consequent slackening of the ties of kinship. A more significant feature of this society is a classification of its members in well-defined groups and castes. Theoretically there were four castes; and the twelfth and thirteenth Books have elaborate discussions of their respective duties. The heroic stories, however, generally deal with only the upper two of these, the Brāhmaṇa and the Kṣatriya. The chief business of the former was to act as a priest and of the latter to fight; and we have to start our investigation by considering how far the two kept to these usual duties, and whether they were placed in watertight compartments.

To take the priests first, we may know a good deal of their life from some stories near the beginning of the first Book. One of the Brāhmaṇa's main duties was to act as a teacher,<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Contrast, however, Śalya fighting against his sister's sons—a curious instance from many points of view.

<sup>2</sup> Curiously enough Hopkins finds the *mātula* (maternal uncle) more important in later literature than in earlier; but as he suggests, the change may be purely linguistic—*mātula*, in later literature, coming to mean "uncle" in general.

<sup>3</sup> This, of course, in addition to his duties at sacrifices, and bardic occupations, for which see the discussion of "Early Indian Minstrelsy".

and the students who came to learn spiritual wisdom lived with him as his disciples and were expected to obey him implicitly in everything. Thus we hear of a sage, Dhaumya, who had three disciples, Āruṇi, Upamanyu and Veda. One day the preceptor asked Āruṇi to stop a breach in the water-course of his field; and Āruṇi failing to do it otherwise lay down there himself and won great praise by thus carrying out the preceptor's orders. Upamanyu was asked to give all the proceeds of his begging to his preceptor, without keeping anything for himself, and not to feed himself even on the milk of the kine he tended; and Upamanyu is regarded as an ideal disciple because he obeyed his teacher at the risk of starving himself. After completing his period of learning, the disciple left the teacher's house, married and started life on his own, teaching students, as Veda taught Utaṅka. The student was educated free and lived as a member of the teacher's family; but he was expected to give some dakṣiṇā (present) at the time of leaving.<sup>1</sup>

Some light on the state of the Brāhmaṇa student is also thrown by the story of Kaca and Devayāni (i, 76), Kaca's duties including the tending of the kine and the fetching of sacrificial wood and Kuśa grass for the use of the preceptor. He was regularly taught sacred lore by the preceptor, until he became proficient in all the scriptures and knew all the Vedas by heart. The hermitages of the famous sages were thus great centres of learning where the students congregated. Such hermitages were those of Vasiṣṭha and Viśvāmitra in ix, 42 and of Kaṇva in i, 70. The hermits were not all men, as we know from ix, 54: ladies sometimes practised *Brahmacarya* and acquired great learning, as in the Upaniṣada instances of Maitreyī and Gārgī.

The Brāhmaṇa preceptor had various means of livelihood. The main source was the proceeds of begging, and sometimes gifts from princes included land and cattle. Thus the priest carried on agriculture and tended cattle as well, and could depend on the proceeds for his livelihood. Sometimes there was great rivalry between prominent sages, the Vasiṣṭha-Viśvāmitra strife (ix, 42) being the most famous instance of such rivalry. Perhaps some of these quarrels originated in a desire for the exclusive patronage of some powerful king, of

<sup>1</sup> For didactic rules on discipleship, see xii, 66, and 242; also v, 44.

obtaining him as a disciple (cf. i, 178-9); and the priest was generally a prominent figure in the court. Some Brāhmaṇas, again, cherished military ambitions, and we shall see later that just as the warrior sometimes became a hermit and attained Brāhmaṇahood, so the priest sometimes became, to all intents and purposes, a Kṣatriya.

The Kṣatriya's business was to fight, and, according to the didactic epic, his duty was to die on the battle-field or, if he lived to be old, to die in retirement in the forest (xii, 29 and xiii, 85. Cf. v, 160, 81 ff.). The Kṣatriya son should possess "strength, prowess, heroism, skill in the use of weapons and manliness" and show these in battle. Thus Duryodhana says in ix, 5, 30 ff.: "The death of a Kṣatriya on his bed is highly sinful. . . He is no man who dies miserably, borne down by disease. . . So I shall now fight a righteous battle and repair to the domains of Indra, obtaining the companionship of those who have attained to the highest bliss." So Kṛṣṇa says to Jarāsandha in ii, 22: "The Kṣatriyas start on the sacrifice of war with the prospect of heaven before them and thus conquer the whole world." So again on Abhimanyu's death Yūdhishthira says to his warriors: "This heroic son of Subhadrā has been slain by the enemy on the battle-field without flinching from the fight and has consequently proceeded to heaven."<sup>1</sup>

War then was the Kṣatriya's business; and his education in boyhood was turned towards the acquisition of martial skill, though according to the present version of the stories, sacred learning was not absolutely neglected. Thus Bhīṣma, one of the greatest of warriors, took charge of the education of his nephews, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Pāṇḍu and Vidura, and being engaged in the usual study and vows, they acquired proficiency in all sorts of athletic sports. They became learned in the Vedas and acquired skill in archery, in club-fights, in the use of the sword and the shield. They became experts in horsemanship, as also in the management of elephants; while sacred lore—the knowledge of the Nīti-Śāstras, the Itihāsa-Purāṇas, the Vedas and the Vedāṅgas—was not neglected.<sup>2</sup> Among the princes, Pāṇḍu excelled in the science

<sup>1</sup> See chapter on "The Common Characteristics of Heroic Poetry" for elaboration of Kṣatriya traits.

<sup>2</sup> As usual, it may be doubted if this priestly learning formed originally part of the warrior's training. It looks like a late priestly addition.

of archery and Dhṛtarāṣṭra in the strength of the muscles (i, 109).

Again, when the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Pāṇḍu grew up, Bhīṣma looked out for a preceptor, well skilled in the science of arms ; having found a teacher after his heart in Droṇa, he entrusted the education of the boys to him. Droṇa began teaching them the use of all weapons ; and princes from the neighbouring lands as well came to learn from Droṇa, being attracted by his reputation. Of these princes Arjuna excelled in archery and Droṇa taught him the use of wonderful magic weapons. Duryodhana and Bhīma became experts in club-fighting and Nakula and Sahadeva in the use of the sword. For all-round skill however, Arjuna is the best and he is called the best of the car-warriors. Droṇa accepted Kṣatriya princes as his pupils, but would not accept the Niṣāda prince, Ekalavya, because he was a Niṣāda, one of a low caste, presumably non-Aryan. Ekalavya, however, went to a secluded forest, made a statue of Droṇa and practised archery with great persistence before that statue, taking that for his preceptor. He acquired wonderful skill with the bow and Droṇa, afraid of Ekalavya's surpassing his own pupils, claimed the meed of the preceptor (*gurudakṣiṇā*) from him, as he had learnt before Droṇa's statue ; and Ekalavya having consented, Droṇa demanded his thumb ! Ekalavya sacrificed even this, as the guru must have what present he selects. From his other pupils Droṇa claimed a different *dakṣiṇā* (reward) : He wanted to be avenged on Drupada, the Pāṇḍava king, for an insult and he asked Arjuna and others to bring Drupada a prisoner before him. They accomplished this and thus discharged the obligation of the *dakṣiṇā*.

The Kṣatriya when he was grown up lived in the court of a prince as one of his retinue. He led an idle life in time of peace, taking part perhaps in tournaments and trials of skill ; but such intervals were probably rare in the Heroic Age, as he had not only to fight when his prince quarrelled with some other prince, but often to go to the help of some king of a distant land engaged in a war, some king who had a claim on his prince and solicited his help in times of difficulty. Thus soldiers came even from the far East, West and South to take part in the Kuru-Pāṇḍava war, simply because their king thought it his duty to join the one party or the other, it being

customary for the parties to send requests for help to all kings likely to render aid (see Bk. v). We may notice in particular the effort of both parties to enlist the services of Kṛṣṇa and Śalya (v, 7-8). Both Duryodhana and Arjuna reached Kṛṣṇa's capital on the same day. When Duryodhana arrived at Kṛṣṇa's palace, he was asleep; so Duryodhana took a seat near Kṛṣṇa's head and Arjuna coming shortly after stood near Kṛṣṇa's feet. When Kṛṣṇa arose Duryodhana claimed his help on the ground that he had arrived first; but Kṛṣṇa said that he had *seen* Arjuna first<sup>1</sup> and so his own services must go to Arjuna, but he was ready to send a large body of his soldiers to help Duryodhana. Śalya, on the other hand, was coming to help his nephews, the two youngest of the Pāṇḍavas; but Duryodhana met him on the way and entertained him so well that Śalya could not refuse him when he solicited Śalya's services in the war.

We have discussed the main difference between the priest's and the warrior's way of life; and now we have to see whether the classes formed water-tight compartments with no alliances between one another or whether it was possible for a man to change his occupations and caste. That the caste-division was not so rigid as in later times is seen in at least several instances. The most prominent instance is of course that of Viśvāmitra who is a king, desirous of possessing the sage Vasiṣṭha's fine cattle. Finding his arts of war fail against the ṛṣi, he wants to become a Brāhmaṇa, and through asceticism succeeds in becoming one<sup>2</sup>; and in ix, 42 we see Vasiṣṭha and Viśvāmitra as rival hermits. Other instances are those of Devāpi and Sindhudvīpa, Kṣatriya princes who had become Brāhmaṇas, according to ix, 40; and xiii, 30 narrates the story of prince Viṭahavya becoming a Brāhmaṇa. When Yudhiṣṭhira is disgusted with war and wants to retire to the forest he speaks of kings who had renounced power and become hermits (xii, 6 ff.). We do not know if they actually became Brāhmaṇas, but they would probably be called

<sup>1</sup> This story reminds one of the Langobardic story about Wodan's help in the war of the Vandals and the Winniles. Wodan promised victory to whomsoever he saw *first* in the morning; and by a stratagem he was made to see the Winniles first and grant them victory. *Paulus Diaconus' Hist. Lang.*, i, 8, and *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* referred to in Chadwick's *H.A.*, pp. 10, 115, etc.

<sup>2</sup> i, 71, 29, says: He was originally a Kṣatriya, but became a Brāhmaṇa by his own strength (*abhavat brāhmaṇo valāt*).

brahmaṛṣis, as Pāṇḍu was (i, 120), or brahmabhutaḥ, as Yati was (i, 75). The Purāṇas know of numerous instances of Kṣatriyas becoming Brāhmaṇas, as we find from Matsya, 50, 88; Vāyu, 99, 278; Vāyu, 57, 121; Harivaṃśa, 27, 1469 and 32, 1773, etc.

There are also instances of Brāhmaṇas becoming almost Kṣatriyas, as in the case of Rāma Jāmadagnya (*Mbh.* iii, 115; v, 178; xii, 49). Though a Brāhmaṇa, he is said to have exterminated the Kṣatriyas off the earth twenty-one times! Then there are the instances of Kṛpa and Droṇa (i, 130-1). Kṛpa, the son of the sage Gautama, is said to have mastered the four kinds of arms (*caturvidham dhanurvedam*) and in the great battle he was one of the prominent fighters on Duryodhana's side. Droṇa, the son of the famous Brāhmaṇa, Bharadvāja, had knowledge of all arms and it was he who schooled the famous princes of the time in all martial skill; later he was for a time the commander-in-chief of Duryodhana's army (Bk. vii).

These instances would seem to imply that the barrier of caste was not a rigid one, and there are at least some instances of inter-marriage. The sage Cyavana is said to have married the princess, Sukanyā (iii, 122 ff.); Agastya married Lopamudrā, the princess of Vidarbha; the two ṛṣis, Nārada and Parvata, quarrelled about a princess, the daughter of king Śrījaya, whom they both wanted to marry (vii, 55). We may also remember that though the Pāṇḍavas were disguised as Brāhmaṇas, that did not prevent their winning king Drupada's daughter.

Again, to take instances of a different type, of Kṣatriya bridegrooms with Brāhmaṇa brides, the king Duṣmanta marries Śakuntalā, presumably the daughter of a priest (i, 71); Yayāti takes the daughter of the sage, Śukra, to wife (i, 81 ff.).<sup>1</sup> Here, as elsewhere, we must not be misled by the didactic rules of the epic. xiii, 40, 11-12 tells us that a man should always marry one of the same caste. This has been modified to mean that a man should not marry a wife of a higher caste, as seems implied in Janaka's refusal to marry Sulabhā (xii, 321, 59). That a king should not marry a Brāhmaṇa's daughter is also mentioned in xii, 90<sup>2</sup>; and

<sup>1</sup> Of course, the latter story has a supernatural background; but it may well represent what actually happened.

<sup>2</sup> Contrast i, 81, 19.

this is probably the implication of the statement that a Brāhmaṇa may have four wives, a Kṣatriya three, a Vaiśya two, and a Śūdra one (xiii, 47, and 48, 4 ff.)—each a wife from his own caste and one from each of the inferior castes. But the actual instances of the heroic stories are there in spite of all didactic rules to the contrary; and we have naturally to take the latter as late additions.

But the didactic epic too does not always insist on the rigidity of the caste-line. Thus the passages from xiii, 47 and 48 referred to above, as also xiii, 44, 11 ff. recognize that a Brāhmaṇa may legally marry a Kṣatriya or Vaiśya woman, though his Śūdra wife may not be regarded as a wife at all (xiii, 44 and v, 12). But what is more important, the issue of a Brāhmaṇa by a wife of one of the three higher castes is regarded as a Brāhmaṇa (v, 11).

Again, it is recognized that it is not birth alone but actions and character that make a Brāhmaṇa. So xii, 85, 17 ff.: A Brāhmaṇa who neglects his proper duties and goes about armed for slaying others may be killed; and his slayer does not incur the guilt of Brāhmaṇicide, for he is no proper Brāhmaṇa (cf. vii, 160). Or again xii, 63, 4 ff.: The wicked Brāhmaṇa who neglects his duties becomes a Śūdra. So again in iii, 812, 108 ff., Yudhiṣṭhira asserts: It is neither birth nor learning that makes a Brāhmaṇa but good character alone that confers Brāhmaṇahood. Even the study of the four Vedas does not make a wicked person better than a Śūdra. So too iii, 180, 21 ff.: He alone is a Brāhmaṇa who is truthful, charitable, benevolent and forgiving; and if the Śūdra possesses these qualities he is to be regarded as a Brāhmaṇa. The proper duties of a Brāhmaṇa are hinted at in various parts of the didactic epic, for example, in xiii, 62, 63, 112 and 141.

So it seems probable that in the Heroic Age, caste-barriers were nothing like so rigid as in later times. Under the conditions prevailing in the period, the Kṣatriya would most probably have the higher position and the greater honour; and the Brāhmaṇa would be little better than what Śarmiṣṭhā tauntingly calls (i, 72) "the king's laudator" (vandin). Generally he would not care very much for secular power and worldly wealth, being dependent for his sustenance on the patronage of the king. In those cases where the Brāhmaṇa

sought to vie with the warrior, he would have to adopt the weapons of the latter, as Dropa did to humiliate Drupada. Skill in arms and strength of the muscles would be the telling factors in life ; and priestly holiness and scriptural learning would be prized only in spare moments.

By the time the stories had reached the form in which we have got them, great changes had taken place in the manners and conditions of society. The importance of the priest had increased immensely, and that of the warrior had diminished proportionally. The prince no longer sets the standard as he did in the heroic stories (i, 82, 18) ; it is the priest who is the model for all. Spirituality is more prized than valour and the Brāhmaṇa is always superior to the Kṣatriya, as so many statements of Bks. xii and xiii assert. A very interesting fact comes out in a comparison of some abstract statements of Bks. iii and xiii with a concrete episode of Bk. i, iii, 133, 1, and xiii, 104, 25 ; both seem to affirm that the right of way belongs to the Brāhmaṇa as against the Kṣatriya or anybody else. But in the actual instance of i, 178, when the king finds a Brāhmaṇa in the way, he is furious with the latter for not moving aside and strikes him with his whip. It is true that our present version has devised a punishment for the king ; but it is curious that the punishment reacts on the Brāhmaṇa and leads to his death.<sup>1</sup>

The didactic epic, however, while following the dictum of i, 177, 45—"Fie on the warrior's prowess ; the priest's power is the true power"—has to insist on the necessity of a bond between the warrior and the priest. Thus iii, 185, 25 : "As the fire helped by the wind can burn down entire forests, so the union of the energies of the priest and the warrior can destroy all enemies." So again xiii, 59, 36 : "The energy of the warrior is neutralized when opposed to that of the priest." i, 75, 14 says : "The priest, the warrior and other men were born of Manu ; then the priest's power was united with that of the warrior." One reason why the priestly author had to insist on this bond was of course the necessity for peace and security, which could be had only through the

<sup>1</sup> The early version probably described how the sage lost his temper on being whipped and cursed the king, with the result that he was put to death by the king.



help of the warrior. But the priest was also dependent for livelihood on the gifts of princes, and was never tired of insisting on the good to accrue from suitable gifts to Brāhmaṇas. This insistence is to be found in xiii, 31, 33, 35, 47, 62 and many other chapters, the point being that, as the giver benefits himself by the gift, he should regard it as a privilege if the gift is accepted.

The priests and the warriors are prominent in our heroic stories, but we hear little or nothing of the two other castes. The didactic parts have of course numerous statements about them, their duties, their statues, their possessions; but one never knows how much to rely on them for the state of things in the Heroic Age. xii, 60, 23 ff. may be taken as a specimen of such statements: The Vaiśya, trading with capital supplied by others, is allowed a small fraction of the profits, and his main business is to tend cattle. Agriculture must have been one of his main occupations, too, but there seems to be a growing feeling against it on account of the cruelties involved, a feeling, this, that may be due to Buddhistic influences (see iii, 207, 23; also i, 63, 11). ii, 5, speaks of the professions of agriculture, trade,<sup>1</sup> cattle-rearing and usury; and iv, 10, 1, may imply the mixture of Aryans and non-Aryans in this class, for the cow-boys apparently speak a dialect (hhāṣā) not intelligible to others.<sup>2</sup> The occupations of the Vaiśya were not regarded as contemptible; and it is recognized that the destitute Brāhmaṇa may follow the Vaiśya occupations. Such may be implied by the Purāṇa instance of Bhalandana becoming a Vaiśya (*Viṣṇu*, iv, 1, 15; *Bhāg.*, ix, 2, 23, etc.)<sup>3</sup>; while Vaiśyas can become Brāhmaṇas too (*Harivaṃśa*, 11, 658; *Brahma Pur.*, 7, 42).

The care of the cattle was an important duty, for cattle seem to have been highly prized as property. The king himself was a cattle-owner on a large scale; and iii, 289 tells us about the formal ceremony of counting and branding the royal cattle; the king personally supervises the counting, examining their limbs and marks; he causes the calves (the three-year-olds) to be marked and takes note of those

<sup>1</sup> See Note "B" at the end of the chapter.

<sup>2</sup> It is not, however, safe to draw any inference about racial distinctions from linguistic considerations alone.

<sup>3</sup> Vatsapri Bhalandana is the reputed author of *Rg-Veda* ix, 68, and probably of x, 45 and 46.

which were yet untamed, while the cows whose calves had not yet been weaned are separately counted. Again, princes do not seem to have been above taking part in cattle raids; and in iv, 30 ff., we get an elaborate account of such a raid. The Trigartas and the Kurus join hands to rob the Matsya king, Virāṭa, of his cattle; and it was only through the help of the disguised Pāṇḍavas that the animals could be recovered after a desperate fight. We may also remember the prince Viśvāmitra's desire to possess the splendid cow belonging to the sage Vasiṣṭha, a desire which led to the long quarrel between the two; while the quarrel between Jamadagni and the Haihayas started from the wrongful seizure of cattle.<sup>1</sup>

According to the didactic rules, the Śūdras had no rights or privileges (xii, 60; 294; 295; 297). In xiii, 118, he is slightly higher than a beast, but 132, 14, is more favourable to him, while xii, 328, 47, says that the scriptures may be expounded to people of all castes—a rule which may include the Śūdras. 295, 4, holds that if the Śūdra is unable to earn his livelihood by serving the other three castes, then he may take to trade or the tending of cattle or the mechanical arts; and we are given the story of his mythical origin in viii, 32, xii, 60, and xii, 319.

This then is the social gradation we find in the Indian epic and we may investigate how far this corresponds to the social order found in the heroic poems of other lands. The Irish stories attribute an exalted position to the *file*, though perhaps it is hardly correct to describe him as a priest. He was a court poet and sage, and in pre-Christian times a prophet.<sup>2</sup> The classical prose-works give us ample information about the priestly order among the Celts. According to Caesar (*De Bell. Gall.*, vi, 13 ff.) the priests had entire control of religion and sacrifices, decided all suits and were instructors of the young. They were excused military service and tribute, but did not form a distinct caste, for they were sometimes

<sup>1</sup> The Purāṇa stories about Kṛṣṇa's boyhood spent in the company of cowherds may have some significance in this connection. See, too, *Mbh.* xiii, 118, 22. Cf. *Śatapatha Brā.* v, 2, 3.

<sup>2</sup> See Hull's *Text-Book of Irish Literature*, i, pp. 181 ff. The relation of the *file* to the Irish *druid* is uncertain. Possibly the druid was originally a chief *file*. *File* originally meant "seer". Cf. Welsh *gweled* (= "to see") and *Veleda*, name of a prophetess in Tacitus. The Irish *File* corresponds to the Gaulish *vates*, but ancient writers were apparently confused between *vates* and *druids*.

drawn from the nobility as in the case of Deiviciacus the Aeduan, whose brother was a chief magistrate. Caesar calls these priests Druids, and Strabo (iv, 4, 4) associated them with Bards and Vates, the Bards being the minstrels and poets and the Vates sacrificers and interpreters of natural phenomena, while the Druids practised philosophy and decided suits. Diodorus (v, 31) takes the Vates as experts in augury and divination and the Druids as *philosophoi* offering sacrifices to the gods.

There were some resemblances between the Indian priests of the Heroic Age and these Celtic priests : both had entire control of religious matters, including sacrifices, and were responsible for the instruction of the young. The Brāhmaṇas were probably minstrels just like the Celtic " Bards " and were certainly *philosophoi* ; and both among the Celts and the Hindus of this age, the priesthood did not form a distinct caste, the priests being sometimes drawn from the warrior classes.

Caesar says (vi, 21) that the Germans have no Druids. Probably this does not mean that they had no priests, for in Tacitus' time <sup>1</sup> priesthood was an important feature of Germanic society. The priest's duties included augury, the guardianship of groves and holy objects, the opening of public assemblies and inflicting punishment on delinquents and probably duties relating to sacrifices. Ammianus (xxviii, 5, 14) speaks of the Burgundian chief priest who held a life office and Jordanes <sup>2</sup> says the Gothic priests were drawn from the nobility, while Bede speaks (in *Hist. Ec.*, ii, 13, etc.) of the priests of the Ancient English.

But there is evidence for a more important parallelism between the early social organization of some Teutonic tribes and of the Indians. The *Translatio St. Alexandri* (Cap. i) speaking of Old Saxon society of a period near enough to the Heroic Age says that there were four classes among them, the nobles, the freemen, the freedmen and the slaves ; and the class-barrier was very strict. There was an injunction that no one was to seek a wife outside his own class. If any one married a wife of a *higher* class, he was to pay for it with

<sup>1</sup> See *Germania*, 6, 7, 10, 11, 40, 43.

<sup>2</sup> *Getica* (De Getarum Origine) transl. by C. Mierow (Princeton Univ. Press, 1908).

death. In England, too, in the sixth or seventh century, there was a social gradation. Thus in Wessex there were the nobles or *gesithcund* and the freemen or *eorlas*, in addition to the free Welsh population. In Kent there were the *eorlcund man* (nobleman), the *eorl* or *frig man* (freeman) and the *laet*, who was probably a freedman. There were similar classes among the Bavarians, the Frisians and other continental Teutons; and in so far as this classification was a hereditary one we may take it as a parallel to the Indian gradation of Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas and Śūdras.

The Teutonic heroic poems are, however, silent on the matter of social classification. They are concerned mainly with the prince and his retainers, the *comitatus*, with the king and his court; and this corresponds to some extent with what we have found in the Indian heroic stories, with the difference that the latter in their present versions speak of the priests side by side with the warriors. The priests are absent from Teutonic heroic tradition and their absence may or may not be due to later Christian rehandling. In the Homeric poems however their presence is well indicated. One of the most noteworthy instances is that of Chryses, the priest of Apollo the Far-Darter, in the beginning of the Iliad. He came to ransom his daughter, a prisoner among the Achaeans, but was rudely sent away by Agamemnon. So the priest returned in anger; and Apollo who heard his prayer aimed deadly arrows against the Argives.<sup>1</sup>

Another point of resemblance between the Homeric and the Indian stories is in the value set on cattle as property. We may think of various passages in the Iliad, e.g. vi, 420 ff.: "Fleet-footed goodly Achilles slew them all amid their kine of trailing gait and white-fleeced sheep." xi, 670 ff.: Nestor says: "A strife was set between the Elcians and ourselves, about a raid on the kine; what time I slew Hymoncus . . . when I was driving the spoil. And in fighting for his kine was he smitten in the foremost rank by a spear . . ." xx, 90 ff.: Aeneas says: "Once before drove he (Achilles) me . . . when he harried our kine and wasted Lyrnesses."<sup>2</sup> From the *Odyssey* too we may recall

<sup>1</sup> There seem generally to have been three classes among the ancient Greeks corresponding more or less to the three Indian classes. Later this classification was generally disturbed by considerations of wealth.

<sup>2</sup> Lang, Leaf and Myers' translation.

the incident in the isle of Thrinakia (xii, 338 ff) when Odysseus' companions came to grief through slaying the kine of Helios. These and some incidents in the Irish heroic stories <sup>1</sup> remind us of Duryodhana's care of his cattle (*Mbh.* iii, 239) and the attempted cattle-raid in Virāṭa's kingdom (iv, 30 ff.).

Finally, the more martial portions of the Indian epic agree with the *Iliad* in overcrowding the stage with princes and hence have little opportunity for showing the relations of the king with his retainers, relations on which the Teutonic poems lay such special stress. But the discussion of this question of the king and his *comitatus* as also of the king's international relations must be postponed till we come to examine the general problem of government in the Heroic Age.

<sup>1</sup> The Tain story, for example. Hull's *Text-Book of Irish Literature*, i, ch. iii, gives us instances of cattle-raids.

## NOTE A

### THE ART OF WAR IN THE HEROIC AGE OF INDIA

There were four types of soldiers, the greatest number fighting on foot, then a number on horseback and on elephants and finally some on chariots. The actual numbers of a division (*akṣauhīṇī*) are given as follows: 109,000 infantry, 65,000 cavalry, 21,000 elephants, and 21,000 chariots; but this number is probably exaggerated, as the Pāṇḍavas are said to have *seven* such divisions and the Kauravas *eleven* at the beginning of the fight. A rule of fight was that horsemen should fight against horsemen, elephants against elephants and so on (vi, 45); but this was not always observed. The distinguished heroes never fight on horseback and rarely on elephants, their place being on the chariots. The hero is a *rathin* or a *mahāratha* or an *atiratha*. There are a few exceptions, e.g. in vi, 20, where Duryodhana is on an elephant, but it is before the actual battle starts. Some of his allies, Bhagadatta (vii, 29), Vinda and Anuvinda<sup>1</sup> are on elephants too; and Bhīṣma says of his grand-nephews, Duryodhana, etc., that they fight equally well on an elephant or a chariot. Uttara, Virāṭa's son, was on an elephant when fighting with Śalya on a chariot, and he seems to have driven the elephant himself (vi, 47), as Bhagadatta too probably did (vii, 26, 41; 28, 27).<sup>2</sup>

The chariot usually contained only two men, the warrior and the driver.<sup>3</sup> It was not unusual for a very distinguished prince to act as the charioteer of another. Thus Kṛṣṇa acted as Arjuna's charioteer; and Śalya who succeeded Karna in the command of the whole Kuru army had been Karna's charioteer in his last great fight (Bk. viii). It seems to have been quite usual for an enemy to kill the helpless charioteer in order to paralyse the warrior. Thus in vi, 45, 15, Br̥hadbala, the Kosala king, slays Ahbimanyu's charioteer and in 54, 117 Sāt̥yaki kills Bhīṣma's. And we may compare vii, 140, 17-18, where Alambuṣa's charioteer is slain, while xiv, 82, 17, describes Arjuna's slaughter of the Magadha king's charioteer.

The horses of the chariot too were an object of attack as in the last two passages. In viii, 84, Vṛṣasena killed the beautiful chargers of Nakula's chariot; in vii, 168, Śalya slays those of Virāṭa and in vi, 47, Śalya's horses are killed. The elephants were not spared either and in vii, 29, Arjuna first kills Bhagadatta's elephant and then the warrior himself. When the horses of the chariot are killed, the warrior generally

<sup>1</sup> The two latter are, however, called "car-warriors" in viii, 13. It is curious that later on (xiv, 75, 9), we see Bhagadatta's son too fighting on an elephant.

<sup>2</sup> We may quote the historical instance of Porus in Alexander's invasions. Strabo quotes Megasthenes to the effect that on elephants there were usually three archers besides the driver.

<sup>3</sup> Contrast Curtius who in the account of Porus' army says that each chariot had six men—two with shields, two with bows and two armed drivers. Other classical writers mention three—two fighters and a driver.

comes out and continues fighting on foot.<sup>1</sup> This he has to do also when his arrows fail, and he has to use the sword, axe or mace (see vii, 192). These latter were not the great warrior's usual weapons, for the hero's chief arms are always his bow (dhanus) and arrows (sara or isu). The other weapons were the club (gadā or nrusala), favoured by Bhīma, Duryodhana and Salva, the sword (asī), Nakula's favourite weapon, used sometimes by Bhīma too (vi, 51), the spear (sakti), generally carried along with the bow and arrows, the axe (paraśu), the old hero Parasu rāma's weapon, the hammer (mudgara), the discus (cakra), Kṛṣṇa's weapon, and the missile (bhundipāla or prāsa).<sup>2</sup>

As regards the art of fighting there is considerable similarity between the Homeric poems and the Indian epic. The distinguished heroes in the Iliad generally used chariots as the Indian heroes did,<sup>3</sup> but unlike the latter, they got down at the time of fighting (II iii, 112 ff.; iv, 45 ff.; v, 106 ff., etc.), and got up again only to get away from the battle-field (iv, 421 ff.; v, 42 ff., etc.). The chariot warriors whom Caesar saw in Britain (*De B G* iv, 33, v, 16-17, etc.) were more like the Indian heroes in this, that they carried on at least part of the fighting from their chariots. The weapons used by the Homeric heroes were mainly the sword (and the shield), the spear, and in special cases, e.g. of Paris, bow and arrows,—the metal used being bronze. The Indian heroes used the same weapons, and probably bronze ones too as the word āyasa<sup>4</sup> seems to indicate.

<sup>1</sup> When Karna's ear is broken in iii, 240, he jumps out with his sword and shield, but finds it better to flee from the battle-field in another's chariot than continue to fight at a disadvantage.

<sup>2</sup> A comprehensive list of weapons is found from vii, 179, 28 ff.; vii, 148, 38 ff., and ix, 45, 108 ff.

<sup>3</sup> There does not appear to be any archery from chariots in Homer. The few archers mentioned are on foot. Chariot archery was practised by the Egyptians of the (2) eighteenth and nineteenth dynasties and the Hittites and by the Assyrians down to the ninth century at least.

<sup>4</sup> What metal is exactly referred to by āyasa is uncertain. The Vedic Index (i, 31) summarizes the arguments for regarding it as bronze. Some *Rg.V.* passages (i, 88, 5, v, 62, 8 etc.) speak of Agni as *ayodamstra* (with teeth of āyasa) and the car seat of Mitra and Varuna as *ayah-sthāna* (with pillars of āyasa)—the colour indicating bronze rather than iron. A list of metals in *Vaj Sam*—Ayas, Śyāma, Loha, Sisa (lead), and Trapu (tin)—seems to indicate the same, for Śyāma (dark) is evidently iron and Loha (red) is copper, so that Ayasa is probably bronze. Some *Atharva Veda* and *Satapatha Brā.* passages are cited, too. Wilson and Goldstucker, however, following Amarakosa, Hemacandra, and others take āyasa = iron.

## NOTE B

### TRADE IN THE HEROIC AGE

The heroic poems we have been discussing know little of the heroes of industry. The Homeric poems mention instances of trading people; but the tradesman is never thought worthy of being mentioned by name. Moreover, he generally caters for the needs of the ordinary soldier as distinguished from the princes. Thus in the *Iliad*, vii, 465 ff., many ships of Lemnos bring wine for Agamemnon and Menelaos from Jason's son Euneos. But the ordinary Achaeans have to *buy* wine from them, "some for bronze and some for gleaming iron, and some with hides and some with whole kine, and some with captives". The lesser princes probably had to buy some things for themselves, especially articles of luxury; but they always looked down on the merchants who earned their livelihood by selling such articles. Thus the Phoenicians in the *Odyssey*, (xv, 414 ff.), renowned mariners as they are, are no young, light-hearted Masters of the Waves, but "greedy merchantmen, with countless gauds in a black ship." One of them came to the house of the ruler of the city, "with a golden chain strung here and there with amber beads. Now the maidens in the hall and my lady mother (the queen), were handling the chain and gazing on it and offering them their price." So again, the "wandering men" coupled with beggars in xix, 72, are probably merchants: and the renowned prince would ordinarily have nothing to do with them. Such a prince would receive his necessities from his subjects and the articles of luxury as presents from other kings as Telemachos did from Menelaos in *Od.* iv or Odysseus from Alkinoos in xiii or Yudhiṣṭhira from various princes in *Mbh.* ii, 34, 5 and xiv, 85, 18. Such presents he would receive and it would be his duty to offer presents in exchange at the proper time as Yudhiṣṭhira did in *Mbh.* xiv, 89, 31.

The rise of the merchant would be due, among other things, to the multiplication of the needs of life, the decay of the art of hospitality and the slackening of the bonds between the prince and his retainers. It is then that we can have songs about the Merchant Sadko of Novgorod<sup>1</sup> in the midst of mercantile surroundings. It is then too that we can have a discourse from the merchant, Tulādhara, superior to the rest of the world in righteousness and wisdom (*Mbh.* xii, 261-2).

A curious side-light on the condition of the merchant in the Teutonic Heroic Age is thrown by the story of Samo in the Chronicle of "Fredegar." The chronicler says: "At this time Samo, a Frank, joined himself with several merchants, went to these Slavs to trade, and accompanied their army against the Avars. He showed remarkable bravery; an enormous number of Avars fell; he was chosen king, ruled successfully for thirty-five years and beat the Avars in all the following wars." The Cambridge Mediaeval History (ii, p. 451) points out that though this event is put under 623 A.D. the revolt must have taken place by 605 at the latest, a date, this, not very distant from the Teutonic Heroic Age when apparently a merchant could be a fighter at moments of need. The fact however that the trader can fight on equal terms with the professional warrior and can be even a leader of men reminds one more of the Viking Age than of the Heroic Age.

<sup>1</sup> Hapgood's *Epic Songs of Russia*, pp. 242 ff.



## NOTE C

### WERGELDS AND SOCIAL CLASSES

One of the main principles of Teutonic heroic society was that slaying a man involved the payment of compensation to his nearest relatives ; the amount of this compensation generally depended on the position of the slaughtered person. In the *Beowulf* account of the accidental killing of Herebald by his brother, Haetheyn, the main thing that strikes the poet is (ll. 2441 ff.): "That was a slaughter without compensation ; the prince had to lose his life unavenged," as here the person to receive the compensation and the person to pay it were one and the same. So again Onela was a bitter enemy of his nephew, Eanmund ; but when one of his followers slew the latter, the poet comments (2618 ff.) : "He did not speak of the blood-guiltiness (incurred by the slayer),<sup>1</sup> though he had slain his brother's son." So also in *Fáfnismál* and *Skáldskaparmál*, Sigurthr slays Reginn's brother, at his prompting ; but when the deed is done Reginn comes and says that he (Sigurthr) has killed his brother ; still he can offer Sigurthr reconciliation on condition that the latter gives him something he desires.<sup>2</sup>

Compensation to relatives for manslaughter was evidently a feature of Greek heroic society as well. Thus *Alas* says in *Il.* ix, 632 ff. : "Yet doth a man accept recompense of his brother's murderer or for his dead son ; and so the man-slayer for a great price abideth in his own land, and the kinsman's heart is appeased, and his proud soul, when he hath taken the recompense". So again in the description of Achilles' shield we find the picture of two men disputing about the "blood-price" of a man slain (xviii, 499 ff.) : "The one claimed to pay full atonement, expounding to the people, but the other denied him and would take naught."<sup>3</sup>

For the Viking Age the evidence is more specific. Thus *Njáls Saga*, 123, informs us that the amount to be paid for the slaughter of Höskuldr, a *gothi* (magistrate), was a triple wergeld, i.e., six hundred, of silver ; and this is said to be the highest wergeld ever paid in Iceland. So again in the *Saga of Harold the Fairhaired* (Ch. 32), we are told that the Orkney people had to pay to king Harold a wergeld of sixty marks of gold for his son, Halfdan.

The Codes of Laws give more information about the gradation of wergelds according to class. Thus in the seventh or eighth century the wergeld of the West Saxon superior nobleman was 1,200 shillings which would probably mean 200 oxen ; that of the inferior nobleman was 600 shillings or probably 100 oxen, and of the *ceorl* 200 shillings or probably 33 oxen ; while in Kent the nobleman seems to have been valued at 300 oxen and the freeman at 100. Similar gradations we find elsewhere in England as well as on the continent, among the Franks, the Alamanni, the old Saxons, the Frisians, etc.

<sup>1</sup> No ymbe tha faelthe spræc.

<sup>2</sup> Konr tha Reginn at ok sagthi, at hann hefthi drept brothur hans, ok bauth honum that at saett, at hann skyldi, etc. (*Skálds.* 38).

<sup>3</sup> Lang, Leaf and Myers' translation.

In India too it is the Law-books which are most explicit about graded wergelds. In Vedic and Brāhmaṇa literature (*R.V.* ii, 32, 4; *Tait. Brā.* 2, 8, 1, 4; *Ait. Brā.* viii, 15, 7), one of the epithets for a man is śatadāya, one for whom a hundred (cows) has to be paid, indicating something like a system of wergelds. Then in *R.V.* v, 61, the Paṇi is declared to be a man only in so far as he has a wergeld—vairadeya—what is to be paid in respect of enmity. The law-book of Baudhāyana (i, 10, 19, 1 ff.) says: "For slaying a Kṣatriya (the offender) shall give to the king 1,000 cows and a bull besides in 'expiation for his sin'" ("in order to remove the enmity of the relatives of the murdered man" is Govinda's suggestion); while for a Vaiśya 100 cows have to be paid. We must notice that it is probably the king who receives the cattle paid for the slaughter of a Kṣatriya; and it may be that the king is regarded as the head of the retainer's family. But in Europe too the wergeld was not always divided among the relatives. Miss Phillpotts instances the case of Iceland in the Sturlung period,<sup>1</sup> while in Norway too it was probably the same.<sup>2</sup> Āpastamba says in i, 9, 24, 1: He who has killed a Kṣatriya shall give a thousand cows ("to relatives of the murdered man" holds Bühler,—though the alternative suggestion is "to Brāhmaṇas") for "the removal of enmity", according to Bühler, though some suggest "for the expiation of sin". 100 cows are to be paid for the Vaiśya and 10 for the Śūdra; while one bull is said to be necessary for expiation. i, 9, 25, 11, seems to imply that death is the proper punishment for the slayer of the Brāhmaṇa. Manu, in his chapter on Penance, has elaborate schemes of payment: one-fourth of what has to be paid for the murder of a Brāhmaṇa is prescribed for killing a Kṣatriya, one-eighth for killing a Vaiśya and one-sixteenth for killing a virtuous Śūdra. But if a Brāhmaṇa unintentionally kills a Kṣatriya, he has to give 1,000 cows and a bull, or perform penance for three years; for killing a Vaiśya it is one year or 100 cows and a bull; for a Śūdra six months or "10 white cows, and a bull to a Brāhmaṇa". We get similar laws in Gautama, xxii, 14 ff.; Vasiṣṭha, xx, 31 ff.; Viṣṇu, i, 6 ff.; Yājñavalkya, iii, 266, 7 ff.; also the laws of defamation and theft in Manu, viii, 266 ff. and 336 ff. (Gautama, ch. xii) may be compared.

<sup>1</sup> *Kindred and Clan*, pp. 31 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Kindred and Clan*, pp. 49 ff.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SOCIETY IN THE HEROIC AGE OF INDIA

#### II

#### *The Woman and the Family*

THE insertion of this chapter may need some justification, as neither the woman nor family ties could have counted for much in the Heroic Age. The general attitude of the hero towards the woman may be taken to be something like that of Marko of the Serbian ballads. This hero's treatment of women is illustrated in three of his adventures, "The Sister of Leka Kapetan," "Marko and the Daughter of the Moorish King," and "Marko and Philip the Magyar". In the first, a lady refuses to marry Marko and two other heroes and abuses them for their presumption in coming to court her. On this Marko seized the lady by the hand, "He drew the sharp dagger from his girdle and cut off her right arm; he cut off her arm at the shoulder, and gave the right arm into her left hand, and with the dagger he put out her eyes, and wrapped them in a silken kerchief, and thrust them into her bosom."<sup>1</sup> In the next story, Marko, who had been confined by the Moorish King in a dungeon for seven years, was rescued by the king's daughter after he had promised to take her to wife. They mounted their horses and left the land of the Moors; but one morning when the Moorish maiden tried to embrace him, the sight of her black face caused a loathing in him and he drew his "rich-wrought sabre" and slew her. Then when he was repulsed from the house of Philip by his wife, he "smote her on the face with the palm of his hand. On his hand was a golden ring; sore scathe it did upon her fair visage and put out three sound teeth from their place".<sup>2</sup>

This is how Marko deals with women and the conduct of other "heroes" parallels it. Thus the Spanish Cid, chivalrous though he is at times, is not very courteous to the lady he

<sup>1</sup> Low's translation of the Ballads of Marko, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> Low's translation of the Ballads of Marko, p. 80.

marries later. He had slain the father of Dona Ximena Gomez and goes on persecuting her. She thus complains of his conduct to the king (*Rom. viii*):—

“ I sent to tell him of my grief  
 He sent to threaten me,  
 That he would cut my skirts away,  
 Most shameful for to see.  
 That he would put my maids to scorn,  
 The wedded and to wed,  
 And underneath my silken gown  
 My little page strike dead.”<sup>1</sup>

So when Odysseus, on his return home, learns that some of the women of the house had been living as mistresses of the wooers, he asks Telemachos first to bid the women to help him in cleansing the house and when the house has been set in order, to “lead the maidens without the stablished hall, between the vaulted room and the goodly fence of the court, and there slay them with long blades, till they shall have all given up the ghost and forgotten the love that of old they had at the bidding of the wooers”. Telemachos would not soil his sword with slaying these women and so he arranges to have them all hung up in a row, “that they might die by the most pitiful death” (*Od. xxii*, 438 ff.). So far as the Indian heroes, too, are concerned, we shall see later that they often regarded women as no better than chattels.

Further, we have already seen how the bonds of kinship do not seem to have been particularly strong in heroic society. Moreover, the heroic poems, preoccupied as they are with deeds of valour and prowess, have little to do with a picture of the family or the domestic life of the hero or the average individual. Yet it would be wrong to say that the poems we have been discussing supply us with no materials for reconstructing the life of the family or discussing the status of women. In the most martial poems there are always domestic episodes throwing a sidelight on heroic society; while practically the whole of the *Odyssey* “presents us with a picture of the king’s house in time of peace”. On the basis of this evidence we may attempt a picture of the family in heroic times; and this picture will always have the lady of the house in the centre of the canvas. The status of the woman is thus the main problem before us in this

<sup>1</sup> Gibson’s translation of the *Cid Ballads*.

chapter, and this will help us, to some extent, in understanding the strength or weakness of family ties in the society we are discussing.

Moreover, it is here necessary to add a word of caution about what has been said in the last chapter concerning the weakening of ties of kindred during the Heroic Age. Instances were cited to show that the slaying of kinsmen was not at all uncommon in this period. But we must not forget that there is a different sort of evidence as well, evidence for a different state of things perhaps in the period immediately preceding the Heroic Age. Thus Procopius (*Goth.* ii, 14) in his description of a curious custom of the Heruli says that when the dying man is laid upon the pyre, a countryman of his goes and stabs him; but it is definitely stated that he must not be a relative of the victim. So too in a pathetic description in *Beowulf* (2435 ff.) the poet describes the accidental slaying of Herebald by his brother Haethcyn, a deed contrary to the laws of nature (ungedefelice). Even Clovis recognizes the sanctity of kindred blood (*Gregory* ii, 40), though his actions do not confirm this idea. The Homeric poems too sometimes assert the strength of the ties of blood, as Menelaos does when lamenting the death of his brother Agamemnon (*Od.* iv, 88 ff.): "While I was yet roaming in those lands, gathering much livelihood, meantime another slew my brother privily, at unawares, by the guile of his accursed wife. Thus, look you, I have no joy of my lordship among these my possessions."<sup>1</sup> Both among the Teutons and the Greeks it is recognized that if kindred blood has been shed it is the duty of the nearest relative to take up the vendetta and claim revenge; and in the *Odyssey* (iv, 542 ff.) it is felt that either the son or the brother would be the first to take up the duty of vengeance. Sometimes a compensation from the slayer may solve the problem of revenge; but even then the compensation would go to the nearest relative of the slain person.<sup>2</sup>

Thus ties of blood seem to have been potent factors of Greek and Teutonic society, in the period preceding or subsequent to the Heroic Age, though in the Heroic Age itself things may have been different. In India even for the Heroic Age we have no very strong evidence for the weakening

<sup>1</sup> Butcher and Lang's translation.

<sup>2</sup> See discussion of wergelds, pp. 142-8.

of the ties of blood,<sup>1</sup> and in the epic we have numerous domestic episodes which throw light on the life of the family ; while even in the more martial parts, kinship and ties of marriage seem to have played a prominent part, e.g., in forming and cementing military alliances. This is evident if we examine the allies of the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas in the great battle. The three most powerful helpers the Pāṇḍavas had were : (1) Drupada of Pāñcāla and his sons, Dhṛṣṭadyumna and Śikhaṇḍin, Drupada being the father-in-law of the Pāṇḍavas ; (2) Virāṭa of Matsya, the father-in-law of Abhimanyu, Arjuna's son ; and (3) Kṛṣṇa of Dvāraka, Arjuna's brother-in-law. And one of the prominent allies of the Kauravas was Jayadratha, their brother-in-law. The battle itself is taken to be between the five sons of Pāṇḍu on the one side and the numerous sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra on the other, among the prominent warriors for the former being the young sons of Arjuna and Bhīma.

In this society, therefore, though the woman is necessarily in the background, she has a good deal of influence, due to her association with the hero. In order to arrive at a true estimate of her position in the Heroic Age of India we may, as in the last chapter, rely on two types of evidence in the *Mahābhārata* : the one is the mass of abstract statements about her occurring mainly in the didactic parts of the book, the other is what we deduce from the parts played by women in the stories. The former evidence has to be regarded as very unreliable as such passages come in the portions of the book which are avowedly late and unheroic in tone. Moreover, they are often contradictory and it is not possible to reconcile statements found in one part of the work with those in another part. Thus xii, 165, 32, tells us that a woman never becomes impure ; but in xiii, 38, 1, we hear that woman is the root of all evil and she is always light-minded ; v. 12 emphasizes that there exists no greater evil than woman and v. 19 says that women of good family envy the prostitutes, wishing for the ornaments and dress of the latter. xii, 213, 7, gives a philosophic explanation of evil : all evils arise from birth and as woman causes birth she is responsible for all the evil of the world. Woman simply hangs on love (xii, 33, 45 ; xiv, 90, 14) and she is always untrustworthy

<sup>1</sup> See last chapter.

(iii, 71, 6 ; iii, 150, 44 ; xii, 83, 56). Still she is to be respected (xii, 46, 8).

In trying to deduce her position from the thread of the heroic stories we are on firmer ground. The abstract statements need not be wholly set aside ; but what one has got to do is to see how far they harmonize with the examples recorded and how far they represent the written wisdom of a later age.<sup>1</sup>

To come to the subject proper we may proceed chronologically, that is, try to analyse the position of woman through the four stages of life usually accepted in the Śāstras : babyhood, youth, maturity and old age.

The first stage is naturally spent in her father's home. To the Hindu father a daughter cannot be as great a blessing as the son who is to save him from hell ; yet the natural affection cannot be denied. In i, 157, we are told that some fathers love the boy more, some the girl. We have an idyllic picture of Kṛṣṇā in childhood, sitting in her father's lap and picking up crumbs of wisdom from the remarks of learned priests. But another father, Mātālī, is not equally affectionate ; he cries out that a girl is a trouble to her mother's as well as her father's family (v. 97). Similarly, i, 159, frankly says that a daughter is a nuisance.

Still, whatever the father's feelings for his daughter might be, in one respect he is better than his modern successors. He does not appear to neglect wholly the girl's education and some of the epic women seem as qualified intellectually as the men. Draupadī's case has been mentioned ; and she shows her intellectual abilities on more occasions than one. In the gambling scene she well argues that she could not have been gambled away by a slave, as the latter has no property ; in the exile in the forest she can argue with Yudhiṣṭhira on equal terms. Similarly Devayānī can carry on discussions with Kaca or Śukra (her father) or Yayāti (her husband) ; and Śakuntalā can argue with Duṣmanta. The intellectual attainments of women are in evidence in the Upaniṣads too, the most noteworthy instances being the disputation of Gārgī with Yājñavalka and the teaching of Maitreyī by Yājñavalka.

Still, when all is said and done about the epic examples,

<sup>1</sup> As in the Greek works of the seventh century B.C. (Hesiod, Simonides, etc.), and Hávamál in Norse.

one is doubtful how far they represent the state of things in the heroic times. In all the argumentative skill of women one seems to detect the dialectic interest of a later age; and the women seem mere mouth-pieces of priestly poets who liked best to engage in a hair-splitting disputation. The long examples referred to are too academic to be genuine survivals from a Heroic Age.

We are also told that women were taught to dance and sing. There are statements to that effect in the *Samhitās* (*Tait.* vi, 1, 6, 5, and *Mait.* iii, 7, 3) and *Brāhmaṇas* (*Śata.* iii, 2, 4). In the epic we have the instance of the women of Virāṭa's family.

There is little else to be said about childhood, and the question about her next stage is whether it begins in her father's house or not. In other words is she a child at the time of marriage or not? In one instance, she does seem to be a child. Uttarā was not above playing with her dolls when she was married to Abhimanyu. But all the other heroines are sufficiently old. Foremost among these is Devayāni who had a love affair before her marriage. Śakuntalā is certainly not a child when she meets Duṣmanta. Kuntī and Satyawatī had sons before marriage.<sup>1</sup> Damayanti has certainly arrived at years of discretion when she chooses Nala; and Draupadī is not a baby at the time of her svayamvara. Sāvitrī when old enough requested her father to let her go in search of a bridegroom. Subhadrā and the daughters of Kāśirāja are not children at the time of marriage, and we may neglect the didactic rules fixing 7 or 10 as the proper marriageable age (xiii, 44, 12, etc.).

If the daughter was a grown-up woman at the time of marriage, how far was she at liberty to choose her own husband? This brings us to a consideration of the different kinds of marriage in the epic. We need not here go into the academic discussion of the eight kinds of marriage as to which are proper for *Brāhmaṇas*, which for *Kṣatriyas*, and so on. We may broadly divide the kinds of marriage into three groups: (1) by the payment of a price for the bride; (2) by mutual consent of bride and bridegroom; and (3) by forcible abduction of the bride.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. i, 120, 33-4, where in the list of sons, the son born in maidenhood is mentioned.



The first method seems to have been fairly prevalent, though it is repeatedly condemned. Thus xiii, 45, 18 : "One taking a fee for his daughter's marriage goes to hell." vii, 73, 42 : "One disposing of a girl for fee is wicked." But the practice is there. The king of the Madras refuses to give his sister to a suitor who though acceptable otherwise had not offered a fee for the bride (i, 113). The suitor has to pay the price, and he who is looked on as a great saint pronounces himself in favour of such a law (i, 113, 12 ff.). In xiii, 4, Gādhī would not give his daughter to Ricika until the latter paid a fee for her. The marriage fee is also mentioned in i, 193.

Of course, there is another side to the picture ; and a dowry paid to a daughter or a son-in-law is not unknown. Virāṭa bestows 7,000 horses and 200 elephants on his son-in-law (iv, 72) ; Kṛṣṇa carries gifts to his sister's husband (i, 221) ; Drupada makes many gifts on the occasion of his daughter's marriage. We need not here enter into a discussion of the question as to how far such a dowry was the property of the bride.

Marriages after the payment of money for the bride are not peculiar to the Heroic Age of India. Procopius narrates the story of Radiger, a prince of the Warni, who sought the sister of the King of the Angli in marriage. He had to pay a large sum of money in furtherance of his suit.<sup>1</sup> Among the Greeks too the payment of *etihna* is repeatedly mentioned ; and in some passages it certainly denotes the sum paid by the bridegroom to the bride's guardian, though in others it probably refers to the presents given to the bride by her relatives. In *Od.* i, 277-8 and ii, 53, we hear of the price to be paid for Penelope. In *Od.* xv, 367, Ktimene's parents send her to Same and get a "great bride-price". Idomeneus in his taunting speech in *Il.* xiii, 375 ff., mentions the gifts of wooing. As a rule perhaps the bride goes to the highest bidder, but in the case of a favoured suitor, the price may be remitted. Thus Agamemnon in *Il.* ix, 140 ff., says that he has three daughters in his "well-built hall" ; and Achilles may take to Peleus' house any one of them without gifts of wooing. Then again a portion of the bride-price may

<sup>1</sup> The *Lex Saxonum* says that 800 shillings are to be paid for the bride if the parents are willing ; 600 if the parents are unwilling. Cf. Mundr in Norse.

go back with a daughter "dearly beloved" as in *Od.* i, 278 and ii, 196. In the Hesiodic Fragment, 93, "gifts of wooing" are sent by the suitors to Helen.

Coming now to the second method of marriage, of the mutual consent of the bride and the bridegroom, we may find numerous examples. It is thus that Devayānī and Śarmiṣṭhā marry Yayāti, that Śakuntalā marries Duṣmanta and Sāvitrī Satyavān. Here too we may repeat what we have already pointed out, that the modern Hindu ideas with regard to caste did not always stand in the way of the heroes and heroines of the epic<sup>1</sup>; and we may recall the instances of Devayānī and Yayāti, of Śakuntalā and Duṣmanta, of Sukanyā and Cyavana, and of the Pāṇḍavas disguised as Brāhmaṇas winning Draupadī.

This brings us to the very important variant of mutual consent, the formal svayamvara. This is the formal selection of the bridegroom by the bride from amongst a host of assembled suitors. It is thus that Damayantī chose Nala, and Pṛthā chose Pāṇḍu. The father of the bride invites princes from far and near to come to an assembly where his daughter will choose a husband. Many famous princes arrive and are seated in a great hall on the day of choice. The princess then enters the hall with a garland in her hand, a garland which she places round the neck of the prince of her choice; and then the marriage rites are celebrated in due form with all pomp and ceremony.

We must distinguish between this pure svayamvara and that where the bride is bestowed on one who performs a definite deed of prowess at the assembly. Thus the condition of winning Draupadī is success in a feat of archery, of winning Sītā, the bending of a bow. In such cases the bride has no free choice. Once the specified deed has been performed, she must accept the successful hero. She may, however, prevent some hero from taking part in the competition by expressing beforehand her definite disapproval of him. Thus Draupadī excluded Karna from the number of her suitors. It is practically certain that marriage by svayamvara was meant only for Kṣatriyas. In i, 221, 21, marriage by svayamvara is said to be the proper marriage for Kṣatriyas. We may compare i, 102, 11: "The svayamvara

<sup>1</sup> See last chapter, pp. 131-2.

form is highly praised by Kṣatriyas"; and 191, 7: "According to the Śruti, the svayamvara is for the Kṣatriyas." This is probably the reason why the Kṣatriyas make a vigorous protest when Arjuna, disguised as a Brāhmaṇa, wants to take part in the competition of archery for winning Draupadī; and the protests become more articulate—develop, in fact, into a regular fight—when Drupada expresses his intention of bestowing his daughter on the successful Arjuna.

For the marriage by mutual consent we naturally have a good many parallels in the Heroic Age of European lands; and we may mention the instances of Walther and Hiltgund and Hagbarth and Signy among others. For the svayamvara, proper it is difficult to cite any parallels. The nearest approach is perhaps the choice of a husband by Skathi from amongst the assembled gods.<sup>1</sup> For the other form of svayamvara, for the winning of a bride by a contest with other suitors, we have at least one good instance in Homer. Penelope promised to marry one who could bend Odysseus' bow and send an arrow through twelve axe-heads. The former task reminds one of Rāma's feat and the latter of Arjuna's.<sup>2</sup>

This winning of a wife by prowess in a contest is explained at times in Sanskrit literature as a variant of the payment of a bride-price. The suitor pays for her with *vīryaśulka*, the fee of bravery, as the Agni Purāṇa (v. 11-2) explains in Rāma's case. But this method is also connected with the third way of winning a bride, namely by forcible capture.

It is thus that Arjuna wins Subhadrā and he is advised to do so by Kṛṣṇa who thinks this a very proper Kṣatriya form of marriage. Bhīṣma's abduction of the daughters of Kāśīrāja is a similar instance, though there the ceremony started as a svayamvara.<sup>3</sup> Such abduction was not, in itself, regarded as marriage. The ceremony was celebrated afterwards, as in the case of Arjuna and Subhadrā. In the case of Bhīṣma, of course, he carried the girls away not for himself,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Saxo, p. 27, Engl. transl. Also account of Helen's marriage in the Hesiodic Fragments.

<sup>2</sup> We may compare the story of Kleisthenes' daughter (in *Herod.*, vi, 126 ff.). Also the story of Pelops in Pindar. In the case of Brynhild in the *Nibelungenlied* the suitors had to contend not against other competitors, but against the bride herself.

<sup>3</sup> An exact parallel is found in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* story of the abduction of Duryodhana's daughter by Kṛṣṇa's son, Sāmba (v, p. 85). Sāmba was pursued and captured by Duryodhana, but released through the prowess of his uncle, Balarāma.

but for his brother, who married two of them, while the third was allowed to go away to the prince whom she loved and whom she would have chosen at the svayamvara if Bhīṣma had not interfered.

As might be expected, such forcible capture of the bride is not unknown in the Heroic Age of European lands. The case of Hethinn and Hildr is most to the point, the latter being carried away by the former in the absence of her father, Hōgni. Similar may have been the story of the origin of the quarrel between Hnaef's family and Finn.<sup>1</sup> The abduction of Helen may also be regarded as a parallel.

But this carrying off of the bride to the husband's home brings with it the question whether the bride had, in all cases, to leave her father's home and go to her husband's. The general rule seems to have been for the bride to go to her husband's home; and we have already dealt with the exceptional instance of Arjuna who is said to have married Citrāṅgadā, the daughter of the Rājā of Maṇipura, and had by her a son who remained with his mother in her father's home when Arjuna returned to his kingdom. Of course, we may not regard this or Arjuna's connection with Ulūpi, the daughter of the king of Nāgas, as a regular marriage, as Arjuna had other wives at home, but as we shall see later, polygamy was prevalent in royal families. We may also note the instances of Śakuntalā and Śāntanu's wife, Gaṅgā, both of whom kept their sons with themselves when the husband went away to his own home. But it is doubtful if either of these can be called a regular marriage.

To come now to the question of the wife's position in her husband's home, we must first note that she may have to put up with co-wives. *Ādi.*, ch. 160, tells us that polygamy in men is an act of merit and most of the epic princes are polygamous. Arjuna's case has been already mentioned; Bhīma too has several wives; Yayāti had at least two, while Duṣmanta seems to have had several; Bhīṣma brought three girls to be married to his brother, and Pāṇḍu had two wives; and we may go on multiplying instances. Co-wives did not naturally become friends and as Hopkins points out (*JAOS.* xiii, p. 354, note) there are many remarks on the jealousy of wives. We may remember, in particular, the

<sup>1</sup> Möller's Theory.

sentiments of Devayānī and Draupadī on learning of a second marriage of their husbands.

Polygamy was quite common among the greater princes of Europe in the Heroic Age or in the centuries immediately preceding. Eormanric is one of the most noteworthy instances and we have numerous other examples. One of the reasons of polygamy may have been that marriages were often matters of convenience ; that is, a prince sometimes married the daughter of another to cement an alliance with him. Thus Virāṭa offered Uttarā as a wife to Arjuna ; but the latter refused the offer.

The discussion of polygamy brings with it that of polyandry which we dealt with in the last chapter, and we found that the particular form of polyandry found in the epic is connected with the principle of levirate and "Niyoga". This principle of the "Niyoga" throws some light on the status of the wife, in that it shows what the main aim of marriage was. Marriage was primarily for raising issue, for a son's services in offering piṇḍas (oblations) to the pitṛs (ancestors) were necessary in procuring salvation for the father (i, 160). The son saves his father from the hell called *put* (*Rām.* ii, 150 ; *Mbh.* i, 160 and ii, 74) ; and for a king a son is doubly valuable as an heir. A legend like that of Jantu in iii, 127, shows how kings sought to have more sons than one, for "one son is no son". A curse is said to fall on all barren women (xiii, 127 ; xiii, 129) and we read in Law-books (*Āpastamba* ii, 5, 11, 12 ; *Manu* ix, 81) that if the first wife fails to bear a son, the husband must have a second wife. A wife in iii, 97, while claiming that love should be shown to a wife has to acknowledge that a woman is wedded only that she may bring forth offspring.

It must be noted in this connection that a daughter can never offer "piṇḍa" to her father, but the daughter's son can ; and this point operated adversely in the matter of the marriage of a brotherless girl. The husband of such a girl could not expect the first "piṇḍa" from his son, for that would go to the mother's father. Hence the Vedic condemnation of the girl without a brother (*R. V.* i, 124, 7 ; cf. *Manu* iii, 11, and ix, 136).

Yet it cannot be denied that the wife was to some extent a companion too. In the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (i, 9, 2, 14)

she shares with her husband in sacrifices; and in the epic (i, 119) the wife shares the right of penance with the husband, accompanying him to the forest. Then there are passages like those culled by Hopkins on pp. 363-4 of *JAOS*. xiii: "Without a wife the house is empty" or like "a dreary forest"; "a man's highest good is a wife"; "there is no medicine equal to a wife, no friend like a wife, no refuge like a wife"; "one's wife is a friend given by God"; "happy are those that have wives, the highest good"; "reverend are women, sacred lamps in the house"; "wives are the joy of a house" (see v, 38, 88; xii, 144-5 ff.; xii, 267, 31; xii, 343, 18; iii, 61, 29-30; iii, 313, 72; i, 74, 42-8; iv, 2, 17; v, 38, 11).

But passages like those in iii, 96, and iii, 106, explain that a wife's importance lies in her husband taking birth in her as son. With it we may compare xii, 267, 82 ff.; iv, 21, 40 ff.; and i, 74, 37 ff.<sup>1</sup> Thus it is the husband who glorifies the wife; and if we may again borrow from Hopkins' list, we have passages like: "a woman's sole possession is her husband"; "he is her chief ornament"; "she has no divinity equal to her husband"; "he is her sole hope and possession, her protector and her refuge." (See i, 104, 30; i, 233, 26; iii, 68, 19; iii, 234, 2; xii, 145, 4; xii, 148, 7 ff.; xiii, 146, 40 ff.) Also xii, 145, 3: "When the husband is pleased, the divinities are pleased" and xiii, 46, 12: "The wife obtains heaven solely by obedience to her husband." We may also look at the long and detailed list of the wife's duties as given in xiii, 123, 1 ff.

We have always to take abstract statements with caution; yet the stories themselves seem to confirm the idea that a woman's highest object of worship is her husband. These are the feelings of Sītā and Sāvitri, Draupadī and Damayanti; and it must be said that in some of these cases the husbands hardly deserve the regard shown them. Some consideration is shown to wives in minor episodes like those of xiv, 90, and xiii, 95.

We must mention also that though general statements

<sup>1</sup> Kṛṣṇā urges Bhīma to defend her against Kicaka. This is her expostulation: "By protecting one's wife, one's offspring are protected; and by protecting one's offspring one protects oneself. It is because one begets one's own self in one's wife, the wife is called a jāyā." So also Śakuntalā to Duṣmanta.

may regard the marriage only as a means of raising issue, the tone of the heroic stories is not always the same. As has been pointed out before, love-marriages are not unknown. In the stories of Devayānī, Śakuntalā, Damayantī and Sāvitrī, love plays a prominent part; marriage is the natural outcome of love. The necessity of having legal issue may have been recognized by all heroes, all the more so because a prince seems generally to have been succeeded by his eldest son if the latter happened to be of sound health, without any infirmities. But even if marriage was a necessary event for the hero, the choice of a wife was not a thing of minor importance. The priestly generalizations about the aim of marriage might blind us to this fact and might lead us to think that the person of the wife was of no moment. But almost every story tells us that love was as much a ruling passion of these heroes as war itself was; and they were ready to plunge themselves precipitately into either.

In such cases of love marriages, if the wife happened to be of sufficient personality, she had quite an important influence even in public affairs. We must remember that in the Heroic Age politics consisted of the relations of princes to one another. The kings had generally unlimited power over their subjects, and international relations were determined by those of the respective kings. Alliances between states were cemented by marriages between members of the royal families; in our epic we have quite a number of such diplomatic marriages. The Pāṇḍavas in their early life were great enemies of the Pāṇḍala king, and to please their preceptor they had subjected him to severe humiliation. But he became their greatest ally after they had married his daughter. So again the alliance between Virāṭa and the Pāṇḍavas is cemented by the marriage of his daughter with Arjuna's son.

Quite a number of parallels may be cited from the heroic stories of Europe. Hrothgar sought to put an end to the feud with Ingeld, by giving him his daughter, Freawaru, in marriage; Völsung tried a similar method with Siggeirr, and in historical records we read of the various alliances of Theodric the Ostrogoth. If, however, such marriages were mere matters of convenience, the object of peaceful relations was not always attained. Thus Ingeld and Siggeirr

returned to their inimical operations against their fathers-in-law. There are many historical parallels, e.g. the relations of Amalaric the Visigoth and Childebert the Frank. The woman was used as the "peace-weaver"; and when the project failed, she became the most tragic figure in the story. She had to look on the mortal combat of her husband and her father, not knowing for whose victory to wish.

If the queen was a clever and forceful woman, she could manipulate public affairs, to a great extent. In a constitutional monarchy or republic a woman has less chance of acquiring the power she may have in the rule of an absolute monarch. One man may be more easily influenced than a hundred; and the greatest heroes have not seldom been easy prey to feminine instigations. In *Beowulf*, Queen Hygd had so much power that she could give away the kingdom on her husband's death. "Hygd offered *Beowulf* the treasury and the government, the rings and the throne." She does not seem to have consulted anyone else, but to have acted on her own initiative. So *Procopius* says that when *Radiger* wanted to break off his engagement with the princess of the Angli, the latter invaded *Radiger's* land, took *Radiger* prisoner and forced him to marry her. *Paul the Deacon* narrates that the war between the *Heruli* and the *Langobardi* was due to the wicked deed of a *Langobardic* princess. *Fredegund* and *Brunhild* seem to have managed the affairs of the Frankish state for a long time, and we have the English instance of *Queen Sexburg*. In *Homer* we have in the picture of *Alkinoos' court* a queen who seems a more important personage than the king.

Then again the abduction of princesses and queens seems to have been a frequent motif in international quarrels. We have already noticed the instance of *Hethinn* and *Högni*. In *Beowulf*, *Haethcyn* carried off the Swedish queen and met his doom in the war consequent on it. Then of course there is the instance of *Helen*.

But women sometimes definitely instigated their relatives to quarrels. The father of *Clotilda*, the queen of the Franks, was murdered by his brother, *Gundobad*; and when her sons grew up, she incited them to take vengeance for this. So also *Clotilda*, the wife of *Amalaric the Visigoth*, instigated her brother against her husband. In *Guthrunarhvöt*, *Guthrun*



incites her sons to take vengeance on Jörmunrekkr for the murder of her daughter.

In our epic we have some forceful women. ,Draupadī is certainly the most striking instance. On various occasions she incites her husbands to destroy people who have insulted her. Her speech in the gambling scene is an instance in point; and she returns to it at other times, e.g. in iii, 27. Yudhiṣṭhira, unheroic as he is, preaches to her the value of forgiveness and patience. But she has more spirit than he; and she succeeds in rousing her other husbands when she appeals to them. Thus she incites Bhīma to destroy Kicaka and but for his abject penitence Jayadratha would have met a similar fate. As in Jayadratha's case, Rāvaṇa's discomfiture is brought about through his abduction of a queen; only as he remains impenitent he loses his life as well. In this story, however, the heroine does not appear to be a spirited woman of the type of Draupadī. Śakuntalā and Sāvitrī display forcefulness and determination in other ways, the former to enforce the claims of her son and the latter to save her husband from death. Devayāni's influence led to a breach between the king of the Asuras and their preceptor.

Turning to abstract statements we note that v, 38, 43, recognizes the possibility of women-rulers of a land, though it affirms that affairs must be in a sad state among such a people. iii, 51, 25, seems to regard such lands as far off, for those who live in the women's kingdom are mentioned side by side with barbarians, the Yavanas and the Chinese.<sup>1</sup>

The question of women's importance in state affairs naturally brings with it the question of the seclusion of women. Here, as usual, we have evidence both for and against it in our epic. There are various instances which seem to preclude the notion of a seclusion of women. There is, of course, the fact that they might choose their husbands in a formal assembly, a svayamvara; but the Rāmāyaṇa (vi, 99, 38) would have it that this was an exceptional case. It says: "In calamity, in marriage and at the time of sacrifice, a woman's coming into sight is not objectionable."

<sup>1</sup> Nārada's question about the oppression of people by women (ii, 5) suggests their importance in public affairs. The whole passage is, however, a late addition.

But an epic heroine seems to have had freedom of movement at other times too.

Of course, there are the forest-scenes where no seclusion was to be expected. Thus Draupadī could not have been in her innermost apartments when Jayadratha saw her nor could Sītā have been behind the *Purdā* when Rāvaṇa carried her off. But these instances would have come under the general rule of the Rāmāyaṇa, for life in the forest was a calamity both for Draupadī and Sītā. Still Śakuntalā, when meeting Duṣmanta, is equally free; for her, forest life was not that of an exile. So also Devayānī's movements do not seem to have been restricted in any way, and in her case there is not even the excuse of forest-life. Draupadī's actions in Virāṭa's city may be described as due to the pressure of calamity; but Sāvitrī's wanderings when in search of a husband can hardly come under this category. In iii, 309, 15, we are told that the seclusion of women is contrary to nature. Then there are the not very reputable scenes of i, 148, 8; i, 219, 7; i, 222, etc.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless there seems to be a feeling that respectable married ladies of the court, the queen and the wives of princes, should keep to the inner apartments. Women in Māhiṣmatī are not guarded by their husbands (ii, 31, 38), but they represent a lower form of society. When in the gambling scene (ii, 69) Draupadī is forcibly dragged into the hall, she cries out with natural exaggeration that she whom neither the wind nor the sun had ever before beheld at home, has now been forced into that hall. The heroes echo her indignation by saying that they had never caused a righteous woman to enter the assembly hall; and Duḥśāsana's deed has set aside the eternal law. In iii, 55, 21, we are told about a princess that her dwelling is closely watched, for her father is a man of severe rule. Damayantī has to be somewhat free under calamity; but ordinarily, even in her father's house, she seems to have lived in inner apartments far removed from the parts of the palace to which men had access.

Again, we are told that after the death of Śalya and the flight of Duryodhana, women who had never been seen by

<sup>1</sup> A Niṣāda gets drunk in the company of her sons; in a festive scene Draupadī and Subhadrā are as drunk as less reputable women. Cf. also the Vṛṣṇī women.

the sun in their houses were now exposed to the gaze of ordinary men as they returned to the city (ix, 29, 71). After the conclusion of the fight the widows of the slain princes came to the Ganges to offer libations of water; women who had not formerly been seen even by the gods were now in their widowhood seen by ordinary mortals (*Stri.* 10, 8-9). In xii, 821, we find a king rebuking a woman for her immodesty in visiting him, even though she was only a beggar; and a few chapters later, in 326, we learn that the women's quarters were well secluded (see iii, 12, 68; i, 233, 31; and xiii, 104, 138).

So here, as before, we seem faced by the customs of different ages in different parts of the epic. It is probable that while in earlier days a good deal of freedom was allowed to all women, things had greatly changed by the time the epic had come to be written down. In the early days *Sītā* and *Draupadī*, *Śakuntalā* and *Devayānī* moved about as they pleased; and the wives of the Kaurava princes could go from one place to another without feeling the necessity for being closely veiled. But to the latest authors of the epic, such acts seemed improper; and they felt it incumbent on them to offer comments on or excuses for them. So they formulate exceptional cases when a woman can show herself in public and rightly feel that most instances of woman's freedom in the heroic stories would come under these.

In those instances which cannot be comprehended within any rules, the stories are said to refer to a distant past as those of *Devayānī* and *Śakuntalā*. The process is the same as we had to notice with regard to the intellectual rights of women. Though in the early days they were admitted to all religious knowledge and shared in sacrifices, they had lost nearly all rights by the time that the latest parts of the epic were composed. Knowledge of the Vedas was now denied them: "For a woman to study the Vedas indicates (is a sign of) confusion in the realm" (iii, 33, 82); or xiii, 40, 11-2: "There is a revelation to the effect that woman should have nothing to do with religious ceremonies." As in the matter of acquiring knowledge, so in her movements, the woman had lost in later times a good deal of her old freedom.

It is hardly necessary to notice that Teutonic heroic society knows no such seclusion of women. The queen is generally

present beside her lord in courtly scenes; and she moves about freely among the assembled warriors, rewarding any of them who have achieved distinction. It is thus that Wealhtheow, the queen of the Danes, acted in Hrothgar's court. Hygd, the queen of the Geatas, went to the heroes and offered them wine, while Freawaru, the Danish king's daughter, attends on the warriors in the same way. Women of the royal family also seem to have been sent as hostages to powerful kings of distant lands. Thus Hiltgund was sent to Attila, and probably Ealhild to Eormenric.

The Greek evidence is not equally clear. Agamemnon, when leaving for the wars, entrusted his wife to the care of a minstrel (*Od.* iii, 267 ff.) and Odysseus did something similar in asking Mentor to take charge of his household (*Od.* ii, 226 ff.). Penelope mostly keeps to her rooms, but that may be due to the presence of the suitors in the house. On the other hand, Arete is the central figure in Alkinoos' court; and in Sparta, however ashamed Helen may be of her past, she is beside her husband in the court. In later times, however, in Athens and generally in Ionic cities women were secluded. But it varied from state to state; and they were not secluded at Sparta or in Lesbos.

Coming now to the position the woman occupied with regard to her children, we see her in a better position. *Manu* (ii, 145) says that the reverence to a mother should be a thousand times that to a father. So xii, 108, 17, etc., of the epic seem to imply that the mother is to be respected more than the father. But there is one story, that of Jamadagni and his sons, which gives the lie to such statements. Jamadagni asks his sons to slay their mother because of a moral slip of hers,<sup>1</sup> and Paraśurāma, who does obey his father, is one of the great heroes of tradition. There are also passages in the didactic epic which set the mother below the father (e.g. xiii, 105, 15).

Nevertheless, the mother is an object of great reverence. Kuntī is always looked on as such by her heroic sons. The whole trouble of polyandry is said to arise from a casual phrase of hers<sup>2</sup>; her orders, however unreasonable they may

<sup>1</sup> Another story (in the twelfth book), that of Gautama and Cīrakārin, places the son in a similar dilemma.

<sup>2</sup> When the Pāṇḍavas were living in disguise in the Pāñcāla kingdom, they used to go out every morning to beg for alms for the day's sustenance. On

be, must be carried out. On return from a journey the son's first duty is to do formal obeisance to his mother and the mother's will is always law. Thus iii, 292, 85: "The son who does not protect his widowed mother suffers disgrace."<sup>1</sup> xii, 266, 31: "There is no shelter or refuge like the mother; none so dear as she." i, 196, 16: "Amongst all superiors, it is well-known that the mother is the foremost." iii, 818, 60: "The mother is weightier than the earth; the father higher than the heavens." xii, 108, 8 ff.: "By serving the mother with regularity one attains to regions of felicity in the next life." xiii, 104, 145: "One should always obey the commands of the mother, the father and the preceptor."

This excessive reverence for the mother is a sentiment more Indian than heroic; and it is quite possible that it has been a trait of Indian character from time immemorial. In the martial scenes, the mother has naturally no prominence; but in every domestic scene she is an object of great veneration. There is a reason for the prominence of this feeling in the main story. Yudhiṣṭhira, who is made the central figure here, is not so much the hero as the good king of priestly tradition, the upholder of traditional morality and religion which would emphasize the reverence due to the mother.

This ostentatious respect for the mother is to be found only in our epic; it would be difficult to find a parallel in the heroic stories of the west. In the few scenes that we have between mothers and sons, e.g. in that between Thetis and Achilles (*Il.* ii, 70 ff.) or those between Penelope and Telemachos (*Od.* xvii; 40 ff.; xviii, 215 ff., etc.) this feeling of reverence is never prominent. In Teutonic history we have queen-mothers with great powers. Amalaswintha, Brunhild and Fredegund are instances that occur to one. But the feeling of reverence for the mother is not noticeable. The Russian hero, Dobrynya, has more of veneration for his mother.

the day they won Draupadī, they came back and represented her as the alms they had got. Kuntī, who was within, did not see them, but asked them to enjoy together what they had got. Then when she saw Draupadī she did not know how to go back on her word and the Pāṇḍavas did not want to go against her command the obeying of which was a sacred duty for them. The only solution seemed that they should all marry her (i, 194).

<sup>1</sup> A passage like this as also the instance of Kuntī would seem to show that the mother was an object of reverence even when the father was dead—perhaps more so then than before.

When downcast with the prospect of a terrible enterprise he can be consoled only by the advice of his mother. Again before setting forth on his travels he comes to his mother for her permission, "Give me thy leave to ride upon this heroic quest," and he proceeds after his mother has laid the cross of blessing on him.

Curiously enough the most striking European parallel to the Indian prince is in the Servian hero, Marko, whom we noticed at the beginning of the chapter as devoid of all feelings of chivalry towards women. For his mother, however, he has extraordinary affection and respect and he follows her advice even though it might be against all his inclinations. Thus once when proceeding to fish in the lake of Ochrida he was preparing to arm himself, but his mother asked him not to take any weapon with him, saying he was so used to blood that he might be inclined to shed it even on this festal day, the day of his patron saint, when the celebration of the *slava* was being held.<sup>1</sup> Then Marko was in a difficulty: "Ill it were, it seemed to him, to go unarmed; and yet more evil to give no heed to his mother. So he took no weapon with him." Again, when the Turks came to his manor on Slava day, he desired to slay them all. But his mother besought him to stop, saying: "Do no deed of blood this day. This day is thy glorious Slava; if any enter into thy manor this day, give drink to the thirsty, give food to the hungry," and he paid heed to his mother's words, putting by his sabre.<sup>2</sup>

Before leaving the subject of the woman's married life, one should discuss what her rights to property were. In the *Samhitā* and *Brāhmaṇa* literature we are told that women are not to take an inheritance (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, iv, 4, 2, 13; *Tait. Samhitā*, vi, 5, 8, 2; *Mait. Sam.* iv, 6, 4). Before her marriage she is dependent on her father and after marriage on her husband (xiii, 46, 14); and Keith suggests that when her husband died she passed to his family with the inheritance like the Attic *epikleros* (*JRAS.* 1912, p. 427, and *Camb. Hist.*, p. 134).

The general rules formulated in the epic on the matter, are, as usual, contradictory. According to v, 33, 64, i, 82,

<sup>1</sup> *Marko and Djemo the Mountaineer.*

<sup>2</sup> Low's translation of "The Turks come to Marko's Slava". It is curious that both instances are of heroes belonging to Eastern Europe.

22, and ii, 71, 1, a woman can have no property. Yet xiii, 45, 10 ff., 46, 2, and 47, 23-5 have something different to say. Yudhiṣṭhira asked Bhīṣma whether the daughter should be regarded in the same way as the son and what happened to the wealth of a man who left daughters. Bhīṣma answered : " The son is even as one's self and the daughter is like unto the son. How can another take the wealth when one lives in one's own self in the form of one's own daughter ? Whatever wealth is termed the Yautuka property of the mother forms the portion of the maiden daughter. When a person has got only a daughter and she has been invested by him with the status of a son, if he then happens to have a son, such son shares the inheritance with the daughter." Such a daughter has a better claim than a son by adoption or purchase. Again, " the highest sum that the husband should give unto the wife, is three thousand. The wealth that the husband gives unto the wife, the latter may spend or dispose of as she likes. Upon the death of the childless husband the wife shall enjoy all his wealth. Whatever wealth the Brāhmaṇī wife may acquire by gift from her father, should be taken by her daughter, for the daughter is like the son."

These discussions are, however, academic in their nature, and being probably the product of a much later period are almost valueless in throwing light on the conditions of the Heroic Age. If we turn to the stories themselves, we find one good verification for the statement that women are as slaves. In the gambling scene Yudhiṣṭhira stakes his wife and loses her. In the confusion which follows, the general sentiment seems to be that if the husband is a free man he can count his wife among his chattels and do what he likes with her. The point is that Yudhiṣṭhira had staked and lost himself first ; so had he any right after that to stake his wife ? Bhīṣma confesses his inability to decide the point and says : " Wives are always under the orders and at the discretion of their lords ; but one that hath no wealth cannot stake the wealth belonging to others " (ii, 67).

Another royal gambler, Nala, had more sense than Yudhiṣṭhira. When Nala had lost everything else, Puṣkara said : " What stake hast thou now ? Damayantī only remaineth ; all else hath been won by me. Well, if thou likest, let Damayantī be our stake now." Nala did not stake

his wife; but evidently he was at liberty to do so.<sup>1</sup> This fact that the wife is regarded as a chattel is only a special instance of the theory we have had to notice in connection with Sāvitrī, Sitā and the Brāhmaṇi of i, 160—the theory that the husband is a divinity to the wife.

To proceed to the next stage of a woman's life, one has to discuss her condition in widowhood. The first question here is whether she had any right to live as a widow or whether she was expected to accompany her husband to the funeral-pyre. To take up the general statements in this connection we may first mention xii, 149, 9, where it is said that the chaste widow does not wish to survive her husband, but enters into the fire. *Rām.* v, 26, 24–5 says that the wife who does not accompany her husband in death leads an evil life.<sup>2</sup>

In the epic there is one good concrete instance of self-immolation of a widow. After Pāṇḍu's death, there is a discussion between his two widows as to who will accompany the husband. Kuntī claims to have the right as the elder of the two wives. But Mādri's arguments about being more beloved prevail and she follows her husband in death (i, 125). Again in xv, 33, Vyāsa says that widows desirous of attaining to the regions acquired by their husbands should cast off all sloth and plunge into the Bhāgīrathī. Hearing these words of his, those ladies obtained the permission of their father-in-law and plunged into the waters of the Bhāgīrathī. In xvi, 7, Rukmiṇī, the princess of Gāndhāra, Śaivyā, Haimavatī and Jāmvavatī ascended the funeral pyre of their husband.

In the case of no other hero does the widow seem to sacrifice herself. i, 109, 11, seems to imply that the custom was not so popular as it used to be, for it was in the ideal past, in a golden age of Kuruland, that there were no widows. Now women neglect to perform their duty of dying with the

<sup>1</sup> We are reminded of the Irish story of Cormac mac Airt, who gave away his wife and daughter for the branch of a wonderful tree.

<sup>2</sup> The *A.V.* speaks of it as an old custom and *R.V.* seems to indicate that it was no longer practised except in form, the widow lying down beside the dead husband on the pyre and then getting up (x, 18). It seems hard to reconcile this with the instances and precepts of the *Mbh.*, and the explanation is probably in this, that *suttee* was intended mainly for the widows of warriors. Cf. the *Mahābhārata* instances (i, 125, xvi, 7, etc.), and see Hopkins (*JAS.*, xiii, 178, note).



husband. The result is confusion in society, for all men run after a woman whose husband is dead, just as birds run after food (i, 160, 12). The rule that the widows of soldiers dying on the battle-field are to receive a pension (ii, 5, 54) contemplates no instance of suttee. Nārada asks Yudhiṣṭhira : "Dost thou support the wives of men who have given their lives for thee ?" <sup>1</sup>

This practice of suttee is not peculiar to India but is found in Europe in the Heroic stories and elsewhere. The earliest mention in European literature is probably in Herodotus v, 5 : According to him each Thracian has several wives. No sooner does a man die than there is a sharp contest between his wives as to which of them was most loved by the husband. She to whom the honour is adjudged is slain over her husband's grave by her next of kin and buried with her husband.

Coming to the Heroic Age, we have Procopius' statement in *Gothic War*, ii, 14, that suttee was practised by the Eruli : "When a man of the Eruli dies, it becomes incumbent on his widow, if she makes any claim to virtue and wishes to leave behind her a good reputation, to strangle herself to death without much delay beside her husband's tomb. If she does not do this, she forfeits all respect for the rest of her life and incurs the enmity of her husband's relatives."

We have several instances from Scandinavia. Saxo narrates that Gunnilda, the wife of Asmundas, did not want to survive her husband and took her life. In the first part of the *Völsunga Saga* Signý encompasses the destruction of her husband, Siggeirr, but refuses to survive his death : "Merrily now will I die with King Siggeirr, though I was not at all merry to wed him." In the same Saga Brynhildr, who desired to be Sigurthr's wife, killed herself immediately after his death and gave directions that she was to be burnt with him. In the *Hellreið* she hopes that she will never again be parted from Sigurthr. We may compare the fate of Ingibjorg who dies (or commits suicide, according to one version) on

<sup>1</sup> Of course, the presence of widows in society does not by itself disprove the continuance of the custom of suttee. For one thing, the warriors were mostly polygamous, and when one of them died, it was his favourite wife who was expected to burn herself with him as Mādri did with Pāṇḍu. Sometimes it was not one favourite wife, but several who were loved by the dead prince more than all others. But even then a good many wives would be left behind, and they were expected to remain celibate, though as seems evident from Damayanti's instance, mentioned below, they might not always remain so.

hearing of the death of her betrothed, Hialmar (*Hervarar Saga*, ch. 5). We may compare Saxo's story of Hagbarthus and Sygne. The Gylfaginning story of Nanna's death on the funeral pyre of her husband, Baldr, may also be mentioned.

The custom seems to have been known to the Western Slavs down to comparatively late times. It is mentioned by Bonifacius in 745 A.D. ; and Thietmar of Merseburg says that it was common among the Poles in the tenth century. Then we have Ibn Fadhlān's story of the funeral of a Russian noble on the Volga about 922. Among other creatures killed and laid on his pyre, a young woman was slain and laid beside him. She was chosen from among his concubines who were asked which of them was ready to die with their master. A voluntary offer was made, but she who made it could not retract it afterwards.

Where the chaste woman was expected to die with her husband, marriage for the widow would be out of the question. The Brāhmaṇi in i, 160 puts it in a plain antithesis : " Polygamy in men is an act of merit ; but for a woman it is very sinful to take a second husband after the first." The general rule on the subject is stated by Dīrghatamā in i, 104 : " Every woman shall have to adhere to one husband for life. Whether the husband is dead or alive, it shall not be lawful for a woman to have connection with another. She who has such a connection shall be regarded as fallen." The keynote of the Sāvitrī-story is similar. As Sāvitrī puts it : " A daughter can be given away but once. With a life, short or long, I have once for all selected my husband."

The custom of Niyoga has been urged by some to indicate remarriage of widows. But in theory it is not a new marriage ; the appointed man stands for the person of the deceased husband and the children are those of the deceased husband. Thus Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Pāṇḍu, etc., are looked on as the children of Vicitravīrya and not of Vyāsa.

Still there are indications that the celibacy of widows was not so strictly observed as a latter-day Hindu would like to think. We have already referred to the passage in i, 160 : " As birds seek with avidity for meat that has been thrown away on the ground, so do men solicit a woman who has lost her husband." And a clearer indication is given in the story of Damayantī. When she wants to find out the whereabouts of Nala she sends a message to King Rūpama's court saying

that she will choose another husband: "Damayanti will hold another svayamvara and all the kings and princes are going there. If it is possible for you, go there without delay. To-morrow after the sun has risen, she will choose a second husband, as she does not know whether the heroic Nala lives or not!" The proposal is readily believed by R̥tuparna and he goes to the pretended svayamvara post-haste (iii, 70 ff.). We may also compare the taunting remarks of Karna to Draupadi arguing that a man reduced to slavery is as one dead: "Your husbands who are slaves are your husbands no longer. So select another husband now, one who will not make you a slave by gambling (with yourself as a stake)" (ii, 71, 4).

To recapitulate: Before marriage in her father's home, the girl was perhaps given some education and taught to dance and sing. She was not married very young and the marriage was arranged (a) by the payment of bride-price, or (b) by a mutual consent, sometimes in the form of an elaborate svayamvara; or (c) the bride might be forcibly carried off by the suitor. Restrictions of caste were not always regarded. The wife had to go to her husband's home, where she might have to endure the presence of co-wives, as the heroes were often polygamous. Polyandry was exceptional. The sole object of marriage is said to be the desire to have sons; but the element of love is prominent in the heroic stories. Forceful women who had influence in state-affairs were not unknown, and women in the Heroic Age proper were probably not secluded. It is doubtful if woman could inherit property in her own right; and even by the virtuous king she is looked on as a mere chattel. The mother is an object of great reverence both in didactic rules and in the stories. The widow had not always to die with her husband but such a death was highly praised. Remarriage of widows was not common, but not absolutely unknown.

There will always be some uncertainty about such conclusions because of the mixture of contemporary tradition with later academic rules; and the fact that the priests were not only instrumental in the writing of the epic but also to some extent for minstrelsy in the Heroic Age itself has led to a mixture of priestly ideals and heroic prowess; and the most difficult problem for the student of this Indian epic is to disentangle these two threads.

## NOTE

### FOOD IN THE INDIAN HEROIC AGE

The Vedic Indians were meat-eaters, though their principal food was milk and some preparations from it—clarified butter or milk mixed with grain. The sheep, the goat and even the ox formed part of their ordinary food, the slaughter of oxen being regarded as particularly appropriate for feeding guests. The epic shows, as usual, a mixture of different standards in the matter of food. The didactic epic often condemns cruelty towards animals and forbids the slaughter of cattle for food. A passage like xii, 202, 34 ff. is very instructive; not only is there condemnation for those who slay animals for food, but for those too who make the oxen bear huge loads or torture them in other ways. Even agriculture is bad, because the ploughshare wounds many creatures living in the earth, while the bullocks are tortured through being yoked in the plough. It is equally sinful to trade in animals, living or dead, or even to offer animals for sacrifices, the proper objects to be offered being herbs, fruits and roots or libations of butter, milk and curd with perhaps balls of rice.

Such a passage obviously reflects the tendencies of an age deeply influenced by the *ahiṃsā* (kindness to all) tenets of Buddhism and Jainism. In the Heroic Age these doctrines were absolutely unknown as shown in the habitual meat-eating of the heroes. When Kicaka has a sumptuous meal prepared for himself, he has various kinds of excellent meat (iv, 15, 8). When Yudhiṣṭhira feeds thousands of guests, he provides them with milk and rice, *ghee* (clarified butter) and fruits, as also with the meat of the boar and the deer. There were various preparations of meat side by side with those of milk and grain (ii, 4, 1 ff.). Princes hunted deer, as in i, 118, 6 ff., obviously for using the meat as food and animals offered at sacrifices were also eaten. Thus in xiv, 88, hundreds of animals are sacrificed and the meat is cooked according to due rites (89, 1), while 89, 40 speaks of innumerable animals killed for food. Similarly in iv, 72 on the occasion of the festivities of Abhimanyu's marriage, many deer and other animals are slain.

A very interesting episode is narrated in iii, 207: A fowler wants to justify his business by pointing out that animal food is prescribed in the Śruti (sacred literature). Moreover, he can recall the practice of famous kings of the past, of Rantideva for example, for whose kitchen two thousand animals were slaughtered every day. Again what sin can there be in slaying animals for food when every day we trample to death innumerable insects living in the earth? We must remember that there are innumerable organisms in trees and fruits as in water, organisms we destroy in ignorance. The story of Sivi (or Uśinara, according to iii, 131) is rather puzzling to the fowler; but the point of that legend is not in *ahiṃsā* for animals, but rather in the duty of protecting creatures which have taken refuge with us. From all this evidence it seems that the idea of the people of the Kali Age alone being carnivorous (as in iii, 190, 69) is entirely wrong.

## CHAPTER IX

### GOVERNMENT IN THE HEROIC AGE

WHILE discussing social conditions of the Heroic Age of western countries we have had to notice that though the bonds of kindred and blood were weak, the ties of allegiance binding the retainer to his lord were strong indeed. There is plenty of evidence for the strength of this bond in the Teutonic Heroic Age; and the evidence is derived from historical as well as poetic documents. We find it emphasized quite early by Tacitus in his *Germania* (xiv): "If the prince dies on the field, the follower who survives him survives to live in infamy. All are bound to defend their leader, to succour him in the heat of action, and to make their own actions subservient to his renown. This is the bond of union, the most sacred obligation. The chief fights for victory; the followers for their chief."

This statement of Tacitus is fully borne out by later writers. Thus Ammianus Marcellinus (xiv, 12, 60) speaks about Chonodomarius, King of the Alamanni, who was defeated and captured by the Romans in A.D. 356. Ammianus says that when the prince was captured, nearly two hundred of his retainers voluntarily surrendered themselves to share his captivity. Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History* (iii, 1) mentions that while Edwin ruled in Northumbria, the sons of his predecessor Aethelfrith had to live in exile among the Picts or the Scots and they were accompanied by many of the nobility, probably the retainers of their father. Agathias<sup>1</sup> tells the more striking story of Folchere, a leader of the Heruli, ambushed by the Franks: "Folchere, left behind with his bodyguard, would not deign to take to flight . . . He made a stand as best as he could, with his back to a tomb, and slew many of his foes, now rushing forward on them, now withdrawing gradually with his face to the foe . . . So he held out to the last, till he fell forward upon his shield, his breast pierced with numerous arrows and his head smashed

<sup>1</sup> Agathias, i, 15, referred to by Chambers in *Widsith*, p. 60.

by an axe. *Upon his body his followers fell to a man, perhaps voluntarily or perhaps as they were cut off."*

The same bond is in evidence in the fall of Odoacer's body-guard round about him in the hall of the palace at Ravenna as also in the slaughter of the followers of Cynewulf, the Wessex king, in 786. The Anglo-Saxon chronicle gives a full account of the latter event, describing how Cynewulf with only a few followers was ambushed by a rival prince, Cynehard. When Cynewulf had been slain, Cynehard offered his followers life and rewards. But none of them would accept this and they continued fighting till they all lay dead, with the exception of one British hostage, and he was severely wounded. We get similar evidence from the heroic stories as well. When Hrolfr Kraki is treacherously attacked by Hiarwarus (or Hjörvarthr), his men stand loyally about him and the fight is not decided till all of Hrolfr's followers are slain there, the one man who surrendered after the fight doing so to take vengeance on the foe for the treacherous slaughter of his lord.<sup>1</sup> The story of Gundahari's fall in Etzel's hall is not far different, for there too the loyal body of retainers is slain to a man before the prince himself is killed.<sup>2</sup>

While the retainers were so greatly attached to the king, he himself had to act in a way to deserve this attachment. Magnanimity was the first thing expected of the good prince; and he had to be generous in his gifts of land and jewels to his followers. Thus when Beowulf returns home after performing a difficult task he is granted a province as a present; Beowulf himself rewards Wiglaf with a present of land. Jewels are distributed broadcast in Hrothgar's hall. One of the main defects of Heremod, the wicked prince of the story, was that he would not give presents to his followers, as his reputation demanded (*nallas beagas geaf Denum aefter dome*). Heremod did not work for the joy of his retainers and the result was disastrous for him—he had to suffer lasting misery. Another wicked king Eormenric, a "wrath waerloga", flourished because he was open-handed to his followers. As the old chronicler points out he was "more cunning than all

<sup>1</sup> Hrolfr's story is told by Saxo in Bk. ii, and also in the Saga of Hrolfr Kraki.

<sup>2</sup> There are instances of retainers not following their lord in death, e.g. those of Beowulf and Hnaef. But the text points out the iniquity of their conduct and suggests that they are permanently branded with shame.

in guile, but more generous in gifts"; and this generosity of his as also his tyranny is emphasized as much by *Widsith* as by mediaeval works like *Alphart's Tod* or *Thithreks Saga*. The ideal prince like Theodric, however, would go one step further and be ready to risk his life for his followers and thus bind them all the closer to him.

This bond between the prince and his retainer is not so much in evidence in the Homeric poems, mainly because in the *Odyssey* we have the picture of a royal household in times of peace, a household again where the master is absent; while in the *Iliad* the stage is so overcrowded with princes that there is little room for their humbler attendants. Still the relation of some of the lesser princes to the greater ones may have been that of the retainer to the lord, and it may be possible to explain the attachment of Patroklos and Phoinix to Achilles in this way. This is a matter, however, to which we shall have to return later on; here we have mainly to emphasize the importance of the ties of the prince and his comitatus in the Heroic Age, for after all is said and done about the powers of king's councils and the checks on his tyranny there seems to be little doubt that the king could rule his people as he liked provided he had a loyal and devoted comitatus. There are several instances of English princes of the seventh or eighth century being dethroned or slain by their followers; but if we examine these cases<sup>1</sup> we shall find them to be parallel to that of Heremod, their fall being due to a decay of the princely spirit of the Heroic Age. And what we find true of Teutonic states will be equally true of the Indian states of which we get a picture in the heroic parts of the *Mahābhārata*.

The didactic epic emphasizes the importance of a faithful comitatus: "The king who is desirous of acquiring prosperity should always be served by followers, brave, devoted and not to be imposed on by enemies. They should be muscular and well-mannered, born in, and connected with, respectable families of the land . . ." (xii, 57, 23 ff.). Ch. 81 emphasizes the danger to a land where the nobles are unruly and the prince not strong enough to command their allegiance. Ch. 107 discusses how the king should treat the brave men gathered in his court or kingdom. Avarice and anger on the

<sup>1</sup> E.g., of Sigeberht of Wessex, of Osred of Northumbria, etc.

part of the king alienates him from his nobles. If the king tries to exact too much from them or if he persecutes them through anger, disaster is imminent for the kingdom. But the influence of these nobles depends, to a great extent, on their being well organized. The king has to value the opinions of their leaders if they are a united band; disunited, however, they waste their energies in fighting against one another and are no longer the decisive factor in the state.

This organization of the nobles and the importance of the leaders of a well-united band seem to indicate the formation of guilds—of warriors mainly but perhaps of other members of society as well. Various late passages of the epic emphasize the importance of such guilds: xii, 140, 64 says that the king should take care to produce dissensions among the leaders of śrenis, as otherwise probably they may work as inconvenient checks on his power. xv, 7, 8 points out that these śrenis are as powerful as the army and xii, 59 suggests that the king should take the help of spies to get the leaders of such organized classes on his side. The word *gaṇa* is frequently used (xiii, 14, 295–6; xiii, 17, 76, 96; i, 1, etc.) and we hear of the heads of *gaṇas*, *gaṇamukhyāḥ*. These *gaṇas* have been taken to stand for guilds whose opinions the king had to respect as much as those of his personal retainers.

But whatever might have been the state of things at a later time, it seems doubtful if in the Heroic Age itself the king had to consider the opinions of any except his own comitatus. Thus when Duryodhana is defeated by his enemies, he laments that he is left alive and has to go back to his *gaṇamukhyāḥ* and tell them about his discomfiture (iii, 248, 16). And these *gaṇamukhyāḥ* seem to be just the leading nobles of the land, the "captains and counsellors" of a king who are so often mentioned by Homer (cf. *Od.* vii, 136, 184; viii, 389 etc.). The "elders" were probably the same as the more experienced warriors with the addition in the Indian case of a number of priests whose counsel might be sought by the king.<sup>1</sup>

The bond between the king and his comitatus is emphasized again and again in concrete instances. Arjuna had slain Jayadratha in the great battle; and when in later times

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to compare the word "*gaṇa*" with German "*hana*" or Ang. Sax. "*hos*", which originally meant a crowd and later on a guild. It is probable that the word *gaṇa* also meant first a crowd and then a guild.



Arjuna marches through Jayadratha's land, the nobles and warriors attack him, desirous of avenging the death of their lord, recollecting that it was Arjuna who had slain Jayadratha in battle (xiv, 77, 11 ; 78, 17). So again when Arjuna goes to the land of the Gāndhāras whose king, Śakuni, he had formerly slain, he has to face the Gāndhāra warriors, " burning with the desire to avenge the death of their prince, Śakuni " (xiv, 84, 2). Many of the followers of these princes had probably laid down their lives when the princes themselves were slain ; and those who did not have the opportunity of doing so at least remember that their bitterest enemy is the man who slew their lord. When the prince is almost in the power of his enemies and likely to be taken away a captive, his followers rush forward and do what they can to rescue him (xiv, 74, 27 ff.). Dhṛtavarman's followers are not so devoted as those of Chonodamarius ; they are not determined enough to follow him in captivity as Jayadratha's followers were not all brave enough to act like Cynewulf's retainers. But the spirit of binding allegiance is there ; and the poets, with their interest mainly centred in the doings of princes, must have omitted to record numerous deeds of self-sacrifice, of the valour of humble followers seeking to serve their prince as best they could.<sup>1</sup>

From this point of view it is rather unfortunate that in the descriptions of great battles the stage should have been so overcrowded with princes as to leave the humble retainers completely in the background. There it is attachment of one prince for another, the desire of one to avenge the death of his friend, that is mainly emphasized.<sup>2</sup> But the relation of these princes may have resembled those of Patroklos and Phoinix to Achilles ; and sometimes at least the desire of one prince to avenge the death of another may have gathered impetus from the fact that the latter was one of his under-kings or his over-lord.

This brings us to the question of what we may call international relations ; but before discussing that we must examine the nature of kingship a little more in detail. Both among the Teutons and the Greeks of the Heroic Age, kingship

<sup>1</sup> In the didactic epic what is emphasized is the duty of every warrior to stand by his comrade in arms, no matter whether he is leader or not (xii, 97, 20 ff.).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. vii, 73, 20 ff. ; 140, 22 ff. ; 143, 1 ff., etc.

seems to have implied irresponsible monarchy. Kings were sometimes slain or expelled; but it was generally the king's retinue with some members of the royal family at the head that carried out this work of deposing, no democratic assembly or council seems to have been responsible for it. Thus Heremod lost his kingdom through incensing his followers: Sigebert in later times was driven out by Cynewulf. The West Saxon Council is mentioned as co-operating with the latter; but if the whole passage (*A. S. Chron.* 755) is closely examined, it is evident that Sigebert had forfeited the allegiance of his followers and this led to his downfall.

Even in the 10th and 11th centuries, the instances of the choice of a king by the council, those of Athelstan, Edgar and Edmund Ironside, are found on examination to be a recognition by the court and the troops. When Coenwalh gave away an earldom to Cuthred or Hygelac to Beowulf, their acts do not seem to have needed the ratification of a council. On the death of Hygelac, his wife, Hygd, seems to have had the power to dispose of the kingdom as she liked; and Sexburh, the widow of Coenwalh, on the king's death kept the throne for herself. Agamemnon was slain, not through unpopularity as a king, but as the result of an intrigue between his wife and his cousin. In the absence of Odysseus there was anarchy in his kingdom, mainly through the ambition of the nobles of the land. Bellerophon is said to have been granted a demesne by the Lycians; but it is the king who grants him the royal rights. It is the tie of blood or marriage which determines succession to a throne, and the king seems to have been free to nominate his successor.

In India, the evidence as to royal succession in the Vedic period is not conclusive. Zimmer's ideas about elective monarchy have been disputed; and the Vedic Index (ii, 211) agrees with Geldner in taking the passages in question<sup>1</sup> in the sense of acceptance by the subjects, not as choice or election. Kings were sometimes expelled from the kingdom, but mainly perhaps as the result of war or intrigue in the court, not through unpopularity with their subjects in general. As for the Heroic Age, we cannot set any great store by the statements of the didactic epic (xii, 59, 14 ff.). "At first there was no sovereignty, no king, no punishment, no punisher.

<sup>1</sup> *RV.*, x, 124, 8; 173; *AV.*, i, 9; iii, 4; iv, 42.

People protected one another righteously until error clouded their hearts. Then they lost all sense of virtue and vice, became covetous and subject to lust and anger . . . The gods being frightened created the rules of Law and Order and chose one man to act as sovereign and restore peace and virtue." This idea of a monarchy being substituted for an original democracy cannot be substantiated by the actual stories. Kingship is practically universal; and it is only individual passages<sup>1</sup> which contemplate the existence of states without a king, of states where people are miserable indeed.

The order of succession is generally according to primogeniture; and it is only in exceptional cases that the eldest son is passed over. Among such cases are those of Yadu in the Yayāti story, of Dhṛtarāṣṭra in the main story, and of Devāpi in an episode. All these instances are instructive: Yadu had offended his father Yayāti, through refusing to carry out an unreasonable request of his (i, 84) or through an actual rebellion against him (v, 149, 6 ff.). Yayāti thereupon deprived him of his heirship and installed his younger son, Puru, on the throne, himself retiring to the forest to lead a life of meditation in old age. In i, 85 the people are represented as protesting against the supersession of the elder son, but the king of course has his way.

The Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Devāpi instances are rather different. Dhṛtarāṣṭra was the elder son, but born blind; and through this defect he was passed over in favour of his younger brother, Pāndu (v, 149, 29). A warlike age demanded a king whole in limbs and possessed of the manliest vigour of muscles and skill in arms. A blind king like Dhṛtarāṣṭra would have spelled disaster for the state; hence through the influence of the prince's uncle—the king himself was dead—and other members of the court, Pāndu's succession was arranged. Devāpi, too, had defective limbs; he was afflicted with a skin-disease, possibly leprosy (v, 149, 17). His father, on the advice of his counsellors, set him aside and installed his younger brother, Śāntanu, as the heir-apparent. In Dhṛtarāṣṭra's case, matters became more complicated through Pāndu's retirement to the forest, leaving the kingdom in charge of his elder brother. When after his death his sons appeared in the capital, their claim to the throne was

<sup>1</sup> *Mbh.* i, 41, 27; i, 105, 44; v, 89, 78, etc.

contested by Dhṛtarāṣṭra's eldest son, but then there was the additional ground that the parentage of Pāṇḍu's sons was disputed by their rivals. The dispute was ultimately followed by the partitioning of the kingdom between Dhṛtarāṣṭra's eldest son and Pāṇḍu's—a decidedly unsatisfactory arrangement which did not last long, and the whole matter had to be settled by the great battle.

The king and the royal family are therefore all-important in the Heroic State. Much has been written about the king's duties in war and peace. For Vedic times, Macdonell and Keith point out that the proper king had to carry on offensive and defensive wars: The Kuru-Pāṇcāla kings used to make their raids in the dewy season<sup>1</sup> and carry off booty, a part of which they kept for themselves, apparently distributing the rest among their followers. The defence of his subjects was however, the more important duty of the king; he was "the protector of the tribe". In return for this defence the king received obedience and monetary contributions from the tribe; he was also responsible for administering justice. Criminal jurisdiction was vested in him personally; but apparently the power could be delegated to his officers.

The didactic epic has elaborate disquisitions on these royal duties. In ii, 5, 21 the king is supposed to look after eight principal things, the eight being probably "agriculture, trade, roads, forts, bridges, elephant-training, taxes and the occupation of deserted places". He is said to have seven chief officers of the state who, according to the commentator, are "the inspectors of the fort, the army and laws, the chief priest, the physician, the astrologer and the commander-in-chief". One of the king's main duties is to see proper justice done and the sage asks the virtuous king to be careful that his ministers do not decide cases wrongfully, influenced by bribes, and also exhorts him not to oppress his people with cruel and severe punishments (Bk. ii). xii, 69 tells us: The king should always appoint officers endowed with wisdom and a knowledge of worldly affairs for settling judicial suits, as the welfare of the state really depends on the proper administration of justice. While pronouncing judgments in disputes the king should not show any mercy . . . The proper

<sup>1</sup> *Tait Brā.*, i, 8, 4, 1.

regulation of punishment is the great duty of kings and deserves high praise.

The king receives taxes from his subjects<sup>1</sup>—generally one-sixth of the corn produced. It is probable that the priests and warriors were not taxed,<sup>2</sup> but the Vaiśyas certainly were, though passages like those in xii, 87 urge that taxes on them should be light so that they might have resources to improve the agriculture of the land and develop its trade. The king may gradually increase the burden on his subjects like a person gradually increasing the load on a bullock. The king needs money and it must be taken from the rich traders; but they must not feel any oppression or they may leave the kingdom. The king is the keeper of wealth (xii, 821, 123) and he has somehow to keep his treasury full (xii, 180, 83; 7, 87 ff.; 26, 25 ff.; 12, 14 ff.; 14, 14 ff.; 19, 1 ff.). Taxes over and above the legal amount must not be demanded but begged for (xii, 87; xii, 71); when the prince conquers a new tribe he should first ask for the proper taxes and if the people are unwilling to pay it they must be forced to do so (xii, 95, 2). If there is drought and consequently a poor crop or none at all the king should expect little in taxes (ii, 5, 78; xiii, 61, 25). When the king receives these taxes his duty is to protect the people, as many passages of the twelfth book indicate.<sup>3</sup> If the people suffer any loss of property, the burden of sin lies on the king as he has failed in his duty (i, 215, 9; xiii, 61, 82-3).

Most of these rules are, of course, the academic products of the post-heroic age. In the Heroic Age the king would probably not be bound down by any such rules; and provided he kept his retainers pleased there seems to have been little he could not do. On festive occasions he distributed gifts all around (xiv, 85, 25 ff.; 88, 27 ff.; 89, 4 ff.); and he certainly needed to have means for such generosity. The popular king therefore had to engage in expeditions against

<sup>1</sup> xiii, 112, 19; i, 215, 9; xii, 24, 11 ff.; 139; 69.

<sup>2</sup> A passage like xii, 87, 13 ff., discussing the matter of taxation in detail speaks only of the Vaiśyas as the people to be taxed. Moreover, the main reason for taxation is said to be the necessity of protecting the taxpayers, a reason which would lead to the exemption of the warriors, entrusted with the duty of protecting the realm. This supposition is confirmed by the evidence of the Sūtra literature. Cf. Vasiṣṭha, xix, which excludes priests and royal servants from taxation.

<sup>3</sup> Note especially 75, 8-12, and 24, 17.

wealthy lands and prosperous princes. The booty included various objects of utility ; cattle in particular were immensely prized, as the Kaurava attempt against Virāṭa's kingdom seems to indicate. But as we shall see later on, very often the expeditions contemplated a more permanent source of revenue, for if the prince could once impose his suzerainty over another, he could expect an annual tribute from him.<sup>1</sup> With wealth thus acquired he could be generous with his followers and mild with his ordinary subjects. The distinguished and martial prince had therefore always a better chance of popularity in his kingdom than the prudent administrator or wise legislator.

There has been considerable difference of opinion as to how far the king was the owner of all land. Among the Teutons he was certainly the absolute owner, making grants of land to his subjects for services rendered to him, but grants which were not heritable at all. Thus Widsith mentions that Eormenric had given him the valuable present of a rich bracelet. When he came back home he gave it to his lord, Eadgils—a gift to his beloved prince, “in requital of his kindness, because he had given me land, my father's estate.”<sup>2</sup> Deor laments : “For many years I had a goodly office and a generous lord till now Heorrenda, a skilful bard, has received the estate (londryht) which the protector of warriors gave to me in days gone by.”<sup>3</sup> Wiglaf rebuking Beowulf's cowardly followers says : “Your offspring (cynne) shall be deprived of the receiving of treasure and the presentation of swords, of all the pleasure of landed estates, of sustenance (lufen) ; every member of the kindred will have to go destitute of property in land, when princes far from here learn the story of your flight.”<sup>4</sup> These passages seem to indicate that the king was the owner of all land and that though he granted estates to his followers he could revoke his grant at will, and the son of the grantee did not automatically inherit the land—the inheritance depended on the king's pleasure.

We are not equally certain of the state of things in the Heroic Age of India. Hopkins has examined the Vedic and Brāhmaṇa evidence on the matter and is of opinion that the

<sup>1</sup> This is suggested in many passages : iii, 255, 16 ; iv, 18, 26 ; viii, 8, 20.

<sup>2</sup> Thaes the he me lond forgeaf, Mlincs foeder ethel.

<sup>3</sup> Mr. Dickins' translation of *Deor*, 38 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Professor Chadwick's translation of *Beo.*, 2884 ff.

king was regarded as the owner of all the land.<sup>1</sup> He refers to the Vedic passages<sup>2</sup> where the king is regarded as "devouring the people", a statement, this, which probably does not mean that the king was always an oppressor but rather that he and his followers lived mainly on the contributions of the people for the land granted them. Various Brāhmaṇa passages<sup>3</sup> repeat the same idea, emphasizing that the Vaiśya can be "devoured" at will, while in later legal literature Brhaspati and Nārada recognize the overlordship of the king and Manu has a passage (viii, 39) describing the king as "lord of all" which Bühler in his edition (*S.B.E.* 25, 259) took as a proof of the king's ownership of land.

Still later, Megasthenes found that the agriculturists held land as the king's tenants and that they paid both a rent for the land and a tax in the shape of a fourth part of the crops. In the epic, however, we find no evidence for the double payment; what is paid is generally a fraction of the crops, and this may or may not be taken as rent for the land. Here we must remember that the priests and the warriors paid nothing for the land they held<sup>4</sup>; they offered their services to the king instead. This would naturally mean that they held the land only so long as the king was satisfied with their services or needed them. The son of a former owner would have no claim to the land simply through his sonship—he would have to justify it by his work. That the king did sometimes deprive the holders of their land is seen from the repeated protests of the priestly bard that there is no sin "greater than depriving a priest of land"; and the supersession of one court-priest by another<sup>5</sup> might imply a transfer of at least part of the former's land to the latter.

It is useless to discuss whether the king might rightfully do this or not, as also whether the power of devouring the people was a political right or one of ownership. In the age we are discussing the political right probably included all other rights; and the king by virtue of his position set the standard of right and wrong. So whatever the *theory* of

<sup>1</sup> *India, Old and New*, pp. 221 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *R.V.*, i, 65, 4; *A.V.*, iv, 22, 7, etc.

<sup>3</sup> *Ātl. Brā.*, vii, 29; viii, 12, 17. *Sat. Brā.*, i, 8, 2, 17; iv, 2, 1, 3, 17; x, 6, 2, 1, etc.

<sup>4</sup> See footnote, p. 178.

<sup>5</sup> See discussion of "Society in the Heroic Age" above.

ownership might be, in practice the owner was almost certainly the king.

This question of the autocracy of the king naturally brings in the vexed question of the nature of the king's assembly or council and its powers. We have already had occasion to point out that the Teutonic kings had such assemblies though they did not exercise anything like the powers which have sometimes been attributed to them. Professor Chadwick points out<sup>1</sup> that national assemblies are fairly prominent in Tacitus and they survived down to much later times. But after the conversion of the Teutons to Christianity they became practically military reviews, while in the North they appear to have been primarily religious gatherings.

In the Heroic Age itself the assemblies were probably small bodies of the type of the Anglo-Saxon royal councils which were just meetings of the court. Occasionally other leading men of the land were summoned; but the nucleus of the body was always formed by the king's retinue. Thus the *witan Scyldinga* of Beowulf were probably the members of the court who entertained the hero; and the "distinguished men of the nation" in the Radiger story,<sup>2</sup> the gathering where Genseric received his compatriots from Europe,<sup>3</sup> and the "council of wise men" where Edwin of Northumbria discussed the adoption of Christianity<sup>4</sup> were not perhaps very different. In the stories of Genseric and Radiger as also in that of Thorisin the councillors had their opinion accepted by the king; but there are equally good instances on the other side, e.g., of Hygd offering the throne to Beowulf without reference to any assembly or Amalswintha associating Theodahath in the sovereignty with herself.

The councils mentioned in the Iliad and the Odyssey were also probably made up of the members of the royal family and the court in general. The "elders of the people" who were with Priam in the Iliad (Bk. iii) were warriors who "had now ceased from battle for old age"; and the seven of them mentioned by name were either members of the royal family or fathers of distinguished captains. Again, the "captains and counsellors of the Phacacians" mentioned repeatedly in the Odyssey (vii and viii) formed Alkinoos'

<sup>1</sup> *H.A.*, pp. 368 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Procopius' *Gothic War*, iv, 20.

<sup>3</sup> Procopius' *Vand.*, i, 22.

<sup>4</sup> Bede's *Hist. Eccles.*, ii, 13.



council. From viii, 26 ff. they appear to have been made up of "noble youths" and "sceptred kings", these latter being "twelve glorious princes" "who ruled among the people and bore sway". The composition was thus parallel to the Teutonic ones of *comes* and *miles*, the former a man with some kind of jurisdiction over others and the latter, a young man in the personal service of the king or of some member of the royal family. If the analogy holds good the real council would be made up of the experienced men, the *comites* or sceptred kings ruling under Alkinoos' suzerainty. Agamemnon's council in the Iliad is made up of the distinguished Greek leaders; but it is essentially a war-council and there of course few else would be expected. National assemblies as in Ithaka (*Od.* ii) appear to have been informal gatherings; while great public gatherings as in *Od.* iii, 5 ff. were essentially religious festivals.<sup>1</sup>

These councils do not seem to have possessed any definite powers. Agamemnon may sometimes follow the advice of Nestor, and Alkinoos that of Echenoos; but the council as such does not influence the king. In Agamemnon's absence the government was apparently carried on by his wife, who being a strong person managed to keep things in order and to get rid of Agamemnon when he reappeared after his long absence. Penelope was apparently more womanly and could not control her unruly nobles; it was only the return of the king which could restore order in the country. If the council had any definite powers the government in the king's absence would be vested in them; but we learn that Agamemnon had entrusted his wife to the care of a minstrel and Odysseus his household to Mentor. The members of the Council being mainly the king's retinue would have to follow him to the wars and the older men left behind were apparently not expected to act in his absence.

The Indian evidence on the matter is not particularly definite. We are not certain about the nature of the Vedic *sabhā* or *samiti*. The Vedic Index notices the diversity of opinion in the matter; Ludwig thought that the *sabhā* was an assembly not of all the people but of the Brāhmins and "rich patrons"; Zimmer took it to be the meeting-place of the village-council; Bloomfield thought of a more domestic

<sup>1</sup> See Chadwick's *H.A.*, pp. 382-3.

use of the word, while Hillebrandt distinguished between the *sabhā* or the place of the assembly and the *saṃiti* or the assembly itself. All that we are definite about is that the king sometimes went to the *saṃiti* (*R.V.* ix, 92, 6, etc.); but as to what the function of the assembly was or what its relation to the king was we have little evidence.<sup>1</sup>

Another body, that of the "Ratnins", was made up of the members of the royal household, the charioteer, the chamberlain etc.; but we do not know if they formed any definite council at all or if they had any collective duties apart from the individual ones. The *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* (xix, 1, 4) mentions eight *vīras* or heroes as friends of the king; but we know nothing more about them and it is extremely doubtful if any formal body is meant. The term "*rājakṛt*" or "king-maker" has been taken by some to indicate a group of men of great influence and authority in the state, men whose powers included the setting up of princes on the throne; but the passages in which the term occurs<sup>2</sup> seem to indicate that they merely helped in the consecration of the king.

The epic has a good deal to say about the assemblies and councils. v, 85, 58 tells us: "That is no *sabhā* where there are no elders; and those are not elders who do not declare the law." The "*sabhāstāra*" and the "*sabhāśad*" are mentioned over and over again and they apparently refer to the courtiers of various grades. But the important question for us is whether there was any formal royal council and whether the councillors exercised an effective control on the activities of the king. The *rājasamiti* is mentioned more than once; but we are not certain as to who were the members of the body. The unheroic parts of the epic take the councillors and ministers to be mainly priests. Thus xv, 5, 20 says: "The ministers (or councillors) should be *Brāhmaṇas* possessed of learning and endowed with humility." This is insisted upon in many passages of the first, third and twelfth books<sup>3</sup>; and in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, it is a priestly council which is consulted on various state affairs.

<sup>1</sup> Some of the soundest Indian scholars, however, hold that these assemblies were essentially democratic. For the evidence on the matter one may look up Mr. K. P. Jaiswal's work on ancient Indian polity.

<sup>2</sup> *A.V.* iii, 5, 7, etc.

<sup>3</sup> xii, 73; iii, 26; i, 74, etc.

But as Hopkins points out<sup>1</sup> the stories of the *Mahābhārata* represent a different state of affairs. In times of difficulty, the main advisers of the king are his relatives and generals, not his priests. Thus one of Duryodhana's craftiest counsellors was Śakuni, his mother's brother; and the most trusted adviser of the Pāṇḍavas was Kṛṣṇa, a near relative on their mother's side and also connected by other ties of marriage with them. The people whose counsel is most often sought by the Kuru king are Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Vidura, Bhīṣma being Duryodhana's great-uncle, Vidura his uncle and Droṇa his military preceptor. When Śāntanu died, his successor, Vicitravīrya, was a boy; and in his minority the government was carried on, not by any priestly or popular council, but by his step-brother, Bhīṣma, who had renounced his claim to the throne (i, 102). Later on again, after Vicitravīrya's death Bhīṣma had to rule the kingdom on behalf of his infant nephew (i, 109). He took charge of his education and brought him up carefully, the kingdom reverting to the nephew when he was of age. Again, when Yudhiṣṭhira with his brothers retired from his kingship leaving the throne to the boy, Parikṣit, the protection of the capital was entrusted to Yuyutsu and Dhaumya, a warrior and a priest, to act jointly.

If there had been any royal council of influence and authority, no matter whether a priestly body or otherwise, we should certainly have expected it to function in these cases of emergency. But we find instead one individual or another carrying on the duties of the king. The prince goes to the council to listen to its deliberations; but if he has made up his mind already the council has no influence with him. Before embarking on the great war (v, 148 ff.) Duryodhana meets his councillors who speak strongly against fighting with the Pāṇḍavas; but their words have no effect on the rash prince. So too in the Rāmāyaṇa, Rāvaṇa's sabhā has little of influence to exert; Rāvaṇa meets it before the battle, but it is more as a formal procedure than anything else—he does not attend to its deliberations. We must notice too that in all these instances it is no representative body of the people that the poet has in view;

<sup>1</sup> *JAOS*, xiii, pp. 101 ff. He points out how the councillors or ministers were mostly nobles or warriors.

it is only the prince's nobles and generals who might be expected to influence him most, but even they can achieve very little indeed.

Now we come to the matter of international relations. We have to see what the distinguished king was expected to do in his relations with neighbouring kings, for international relations meant nothing more than the personal relations of the kings of the nations. The first few lines of *Beowulf* describe the career of a truly great king, great according to the standards of the Heroic Age. "We have heard in the days of old of the might of the kings of the martial Danish nation. Very many were the royal families which Scyld Scefing with his troops of warriors deprived of their banqueting halls . . . He attained success and gained such glory that every one of his neighbours across the sea had to obey him and pay him tribute." The ambitious king tried his best to become overlord over the neighbouring princes and his efforts were supported by his warlike followers, whose restless spirit could not enjoy for long the formal life of the court in peace and who had every prospect of acquiring fame and material gain in foreign expeditions.

At times, however, the powerful prince liked to consolidate his empire rather than extend it. We find this towards the end of the Teutonic Heroic Age when the warlike spirit of the period was probably fast decaying, and the princes sought to cement the relations of peace and goodwill between themselves by the ties of marriage. The alliances of Theodric the Ostrogoth are the most famous in this connection: one of his daughters was married to Alaric, king of the Visigoths, and another to Sigismund, king of the Burgundians; he himself had married a sister of Clovis, king of the Franks, while his own sister was married to Thrasamund, king of the Vandals, and his niece to Irminfrith, king of the Thuringians.

These alliances did not always bring about the desired result. Thus Theodric had to undertake an expedition against Sigismund to punish him for the murder of his own son, Theodric's grandson. Theodric the Visigoth gave his daughter in marriage to the son of the great Vandal king, Gaiserich, desiring to secure his friendship. Some time later Gaiserich suspected that his daughter-in-law was trying to poison her husband and he sent her back to her father

with her nose and ears cut off. Amalaric the Visigoth wanted to strengthen his position by marrying into the powerful Frankish family; but the marriage ultimately brought about his ruin, for his wife Clotilda, the daughter of Clovis, was not allowed to retain her own religion at her husband's home, and complained of this to her brother, King Childebert of Paris. Childebert marched against the Goths and overran their kingdom. The marriage of Athanagild's two daughters with Frankish princes, Sigebert and Chilperic, had unhappy sequels, and Clovis's marriage with a Burgundian princess was the direct cause of the discomfiture of Gundobad, the Burgundian king.

There are similar instances, also, in heroic poems. The marriage of Signý with Siggeirr did not cement any friendship between her husband and her father but rather hastened the catastrophe. Guthrun's marriage with Atli did not make him a friend of her brothers; and Ingeld's with Freawaru was equally ineffectual. Hildeburh had probably been married to Finn to be a "peace-weaver"; but perhaps her intervention could do nothing to check the hatred generated by ambition. As has been already pointed out<sup>1</sup> the tragedy of the "peace-weaver's" position struck the bardic poet and she became the most pathetic figure in the story. It is difficult to speculate on which side her sympathies would lie: probably in the earlier period the ties of blood would be stronger, as in the instances of Völsung's daughter and Guthrun. Later on the ties of love and marriage might appear more powerful as in the case of Kriemhild in the Nibelung story.

In the Greek heroic poems we also find marriages between royal families arranged to cement good feelings. The most noteworthy instance is that of Agamemnon in the *Iliad*, ix, 144 ff.: Agamemnon says: "Three daughters are mine in my well-built hall, Chrysothemis and Laodike and Iphianassa; let him (Achilles) take of them which he will, without gifts of wooing to Peleus' house, and I will add a great dower such as no man ever yet gave with his daughter." All this he is ready to do, if Achilles will be reconciled with him and fight side by side with him against the Trojans. Similarly Menelaos married his daughter to Achilles' son;

<sup>1</sup> In Chap. VIII, p. 157.

and Ikarios his two daughters to kings in Ithaka and Thessaly.

International relations thus depended purely on the personal factor, and a study of the origins of some wars of the period is certainly instructive. We have noticed some historical instances among the Teutons, and we may add that of the Heruli-Langobardi war which, according to Paulus Diaconus, was caused by the murder of a brother of a king of the Heruli by a Langobardic princess. The instance of the Trojan war is even more significant; for all the princes of Greece banded themselves together to avenge an insult done to one of them by a prince of a distant land. In the carrying on of the war, the personal and not the political factor also predominated, and a quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon led to the withdrawal of the former with his followers, thereby giving the Trojans an opportunity for some temporary triumphs.

In the Indian heroic stories likewise, the personal element is all-important. We have already noticed<sup>1</sup> two instances of the cementing of friendship by marriage between the royal families: one is the marriage of the Pāṇḍavas with the daughter of Drupada, the Pāñcāla king, and the other that of Arjuna's son with Virāṭa's daughter. The latter was purely a "marriage of convenience". When Virāṭa comes to know what great princes had been serving him in disguise he wants to bind himself to them by ties of marriage and offers his daughter, Uttarā, a mere child, in marriage to Arjuna. Arjuna excuses himself on the ground that he has been teaching her dancing and singing and has been a sort of preceptor to her. She has been as a daughter to him and cannot now be his wife, but he is ready to take her as his daughter-in-law. Virāṭa is rather disappointed at Arjuna's refusal, but accepts his proposal as the next best thing, for "he who has a marriage connection with Arjuna has all his desires fulfilled".<sup>2</sup> In the great battle which followed very soon, Virāṭa and his son were among the principal allies of the Pāṇḍavas and naturally they brought with them the whole of the Matsya army.

Draupadi's marriage with the Pāṇḍavas was not meant

<sup>1</sup> In Chap. VIII, pp. 147, 154, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Sarve kāmāḥ samṛddhāśca sambandhī yasya mehrjunah.

to be a political marriage—Arjuna won her in a straightforward competition. But this general idea of giving the king's daughter in marriage to the prince most skilful in arms, skilful enough to perform marvels of archery or swordsmanship, may have started with a political aim, for such a prince would always be a powerful ally of the father-in-law, especially so in the Heroic Age when personal valour counted for so much. Whatever Draupada's aims may have been, the result of the marriage was a firm political alliance between the Pāṇḍavas and Drupada; this is all the more striking as the former had been before this bitter enemies of the Pāñcāla king. They had heaped the worst humiliation on him to please their preceptor, Droṇa; they had captured him in battle and offered him as a present to Droṇa, who thought that his enemy's humiliation would be all the more complete if he were allowed to go away with his life. However, after the marriage of Drupada's daughter with the Pāṇḍavas this enmity was completely forgotten and he became their firmest ally. In the great battle, while Droṇa was one of the leaders on the opposite side, Drupada and his sons rendered the greatest service possible to the Pāṇḍavas.

A detailed examination of the lists of allies of both the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas would show how important the tie of marriage was in the formation of such alliances; we may mention Dhṛtarāṣṭra's brother-in-law, Śakuni, and son-in-law, Jayadratha, who fought for Duryodhana while Arjuna's brother-in-law, Kṛṣṇa, was such a great help to the Pāṇḍavas.<sup>1</sup> We may take it as a fairly general rule that marriage between royal families was one of the chief means of cementing international alliances.

But there were other means as well: among the Teutons we sometimes hear of princes entering into a relationship of "father" or "son" to other princes. Professor Chadwick mentions an instance in one of the Cassiodorus' letters addressed to a king of the Heruli "informing him that Theodric creates him his 'son in arms' (*filius per arma*) which is a great honour". With this we may compare the instance in the *A.S. Chronicle*, 924: when Edward the Elder

<sup>1</sup> It is easy to find instances in other parts of the epic, too. Cf. e.g. ii, 14, 30-3, where the alliance of Jarāsandha and Kāṁsa is said to be strengthened by the tie of marriage.

had been able to make his power sufficiently felt in all parts of Britain, the Scottish king and some other princes accepted him as father and lord (*hine ge ces tha to fæder ond to hlaforde* Scotta cyning and eall Scotta theod; ond Regnald . . .).<sup>1</sup>

The alliances in these instances seem to have been somewhat firmer than the ordinary offensive and defensive alliances, e.g. that of Edmund with Malcolm, the Scotch king, who promised to be the former's co-operator (*midwyrhta*) both by sea and land. But when one prince accepted another as his "father", it certainly meant that he took the other as his suzerain, under whom he was a subordinate prince. Such an understanding was perhaps often arrived at after a good deal of warfare, the victorious prince being able to call himself an over-lord only after he had made his prowess felt by his neighbours. In such instances, the *Mahābhārata* generally takes the victorious prince to stand in the relation of a preceptor to the others, who are like his disciples. Thus ii, 38, 7: "When a great Kṣatriya prince, after having overcome another Kṣatriya in war and having captured him, sets him free, he becomes the latter's preceptor."<sup>2</sup> So too in the case of a prince who had accepted the suzerainty of Jarāsandha, the Magadha king, it is said: "He waits upon him (Jarāsandha) as his disciple" (ii, 14, 12).<sup>3</sup> In relation to the people he rules over, the great king is often taken to be as a father as in ii, 13, 9; but in relation to his under-kings he is a guru (preceptor), that appearing the highest object of respect to the priestly bard.

The powerful prince in India, as among the Greeks and the Teutons, sought to exercise his overlordship, to become an emperor over his neighbouring princes. Some Teutonic instances we have already noticed. Among the Greeks Agamemnon probably exercised some sort of suzerainty over other princes for warriors from the neighbouring kingdoms were expected to follow him in war. Thus in *Il.* xiii, 665 ff. we hear of one Euchenor, a man of Corinth, who would have

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Beo., 947, where Hrothgar says to the hero: "O Beowulf, thou best of men, I shall regard thee in my heart as a son." Also Wealhtheo to Hrothgar (1175-6): "People tell me thou wishest to adopt the warrior (Beo.) as thy son."

<sup>2</sup> Yo muñcati vaśe kṛtvā gururbhavati tasya saḥ.

<sup>3</sup> Tameva ca mahārāja śiṣyavat samupasthitah. These expressions are certainly the product of post-heroic times. To the priestly bard of these ages the relation of preceptor and disciple would seem the most significant.



had to pay a "heavy war fine" if he had refused to follow Agamemnon against Troy. Agamemnon's suzerainty was not probably extended over Ithaka, for Odysseus seems to have been at liberty to refuse his requests for martial help (*Od.* xxiv); but he could not exercise his power over neighbouring regions like Corinth and Sikyon.<sup>1</sup>

For India we find in the *Mahābhārata* a formal ceremony of being installed as emperor (*samrāj*)—a ceremony called the *rājasūya*. But before proceeding to the ceremony the prince must be sure of his position, he must make certain that his supremacy will not be challenged by any one of his neighbours. Thus when Yudhiṣṭhira has consolidated his position within his kingdom, his ministers tell him that he must now think of proclaiming himself an emperor: "A king with great powers in his kingdom wishes to acquire all the glory of an emperor by means of the 'rājasūya' sacrifice. . . . You are certainly worthy of being an emperor, and so your friends consider that the time has come when you should perform the 'rājasūya' . . . at the conclusion of which you will be installed in the sovereignty of the empire" (ii, 19, 21 ff.).

Kṛṣṇa points out that the chief obstacle in the way of Yudhiṣṭhira's "emperorship" would be Jarāsandha, the Magadha king, who was then the suzerain over the greater part of Northern India. Kṛṣṇa mentions the kings who have had to pay homage to Jarāsandha, while others who had refused to do so had been deprived of their kingdoms and had either saved themselves by flight or been captured and imprisoned by Jarāsandha. The comitatus of this emperor is made up of many of his under-kings, and a new claimant to overlordship would have first to get rid of the existing suzerain with his allies. The Pāṇḍavas proceed to do this, and after slaying Jarāsandha march through various other kingdoms claiming homage from them. Some submit peacefully; but some like Bhagadatta offer resistance (ii, 26, 8 ff.) and are vanquished. The discomfited princes have to pay a heavy tribute to the over-lord (ii, 26, 15; 27, 4; 30, 18 ff., etc.); and must be prepared to help him in war (v, 4, 11, etc.). After the emperor is certain of his position he makes arrangements for the great "rājasūya"

<sup>1</sup> *Il.* xxiii, 298, etc.

sacrifice and invites all his under-kings to come to his capital. They have to come to this ceremony of installation, bearing costly presents with them (ii, 84). But the wise emperor, desirous of securing their goodwill, does not seek to humiliate them; he receives them properly and pleases them with words of welcome. They remain there while the sacrifice is carried on; and when it is finished they return to their respective kingdoms, leaving the emperor in formal possession of his imperial dignity (ii, 45).<sup>1</sup>

The fourteenth Book gives us a full description of another method of confirming the claim to suzerainty. The horse-sacrifice is regarded as the best for expiating sins. But as a preliminary to that, the horse is let loose to wander about among different kingdoms at its own free will. It goes protected by an army; and if any prince wants to seize the horse, he has first to overcome the attendant warriors. If these latter succeed in vanquishing the prince, they invite him to the sacrifice; of course the sacrifice can take place only if the defenders of the horse can bring it back to the kingdom safe after all attempts against it. Arjuna, who was in charge of this horse, had to undertake many perilous fights before the horse turned back towards Yudhiṣṭhira's capital, the most perilous of these being perhaps that with his own son, Babhruvāhana, who fought against him not knowing him to be his father, thus reminding one of the Teutonic story of Hildebrand and Hadubrand<sup>2</sup> or the Persian one of Sohrab and Rustam.<sup>3</sup> When Arjuna comes back with the horse, arrangements are made for the sacrifice; and the great kings of the earth come to the ceremony to please Yudhiṣṭhira. They come bringing

<sup>1</sup> One does not know how far one is justified in using the words "over-lord" and "suzerain" with regard to the Heroic Age. "Samrāj," the word used in later Sanskrit literature for an "emperor", is used of Yudhiṣṭhira in ii, 15, etc. But it may mean here just a "sovereign" or "superior ruler", the appellation of an important king. The tribute and the help in war may be explained by the simple fact of the less powerful kings wanting to be on friendly terms with more powerful ones. There was certainly no confederacy of states as in historical times under Aśoka. All that the "samrāj" asserted by his "rājasūya" or "aśvamedha" was a more important position than that of ordinary princes. Jarāsandha made his position most felt by other princes and he is the nearest approach to a full-fledged emperor. All performers of the "rājasūya" do not seem to have attained the same position. (See *Vedic Index*, ii, 433.)

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the fragment *Hildebrandslied*.

<sup>3</sup> Narrated by Firdausi, in his *Shahnamah*.

with them valuable presents—"many gems and female slaves, horses and weapons" (xiv, 85, 18). They were properly received by the emperor, received presents in exchange and returned home at the end of the sacrifice.<sup>1</sup>

The really important point about these international relations is that the emperor could count most of his subordinate princes as part of his comitatus; they were sometimes little better than the governors of provinces who were ordinarily left to act as they liked, but who in times of war had to come with their soldiers to aid the overlord. Or we may vary the language and say that the rulers of important provinces of a king's domain were regarded as kings in their own land. In times of peace they were left to themselves; but they had to come with their retainers to aid the king in war, just as the friendly rulers of neighbouring kingdoms did. Help in war was the most important thing; and if a warrior was really distinguished, he might be rewarded with princely rank even though he might be low-born. This would almost correspond to the mediaeval system of "knighting" deserving heroes; and a very interesting account in the *Mahābhārata* is that of conferring a kingdom on Karna (i, 186 ff.). When the young sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Pāṇḍu had completed their military training, a tournament was arranged to give them an opportunity of showing off their skill. Arjuna appeared to be the most expert of them all and excited the envy of his cousins by his various feats of arms. But when the tournament was nearly finished, Karna entered the lists and challenged Arjuna to a single combat. Arjuna however, refused to fight with one who was not of the royal line, it being generally thought that Karna was the son of a charioteer. Duryodhana thereupon installed him as king of Aṅga and conferred royal rank on him, Karna in return promising him his friendship, which of course mainly implied help in strife with enemies.

To sum up then, we may say that the most prominent factor of the heroic state was the king, and next to him his personal retinue. The generous king had always a faithful comitatus and within his kingdom his powers were

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to compare with this Herodotus (i, 215) on the Massagetae: Herodotus seems to think that their most prominent religious rite was the horse sacrifice, "the sacrifice of the swiftest of all mortal creatures to the swiftest of the gods (the sun)."

practically unlimited. Theoretically he had various duties to perform, chief among them being the protection of his subjects and the administration of justice. He received taxes from the people and was probably regarded as the owner of all land. The order of succession was generally one of primogeniture. The royal council, mainly composed of the king's relatives and nobles, was an advisory body which might have little practical power. International relations were regulated by the connections between the kings of the various lands, and ties of marriage frequently cemented diplomatic alliances. The ambitious prince often wanted a formal acknowledgment of his superior position, and in India he confirmed his position by the performance of the *rājasūya* or *aśvamedha* sacrifice, each of these being preceded by an expedition of conquest and subjugation.

## CHAPTER X

### RELIGION IN THE HEROIC AGE OF INDIA

THE question of government here leads on naturally to that of religion, as kingship in the Heroic Age was often supposed to have a sacred character. Ammianus Marcellinus (xxviii, 5, 14) points out how Burgundian kings were deposed as a consequence of famine in the land; and this seems to indicate that kings were supposed to have superhuman powers, powers, for example, of conferring fertility on the soil and producing bumper crops. If a king lacked such powers he was not thought worthy to be a king. The Ynglinga Saga (C.47) mentions two instances of Swedish kings sacrificed in years of famine and says that the kings called Yngvi after the god Frey, and regarded as his descendants, were supposed to have control over the seasons. As regards Greece also, some post-Homeric documents invested kings of the Heroic Age with divine powers; the best example is to be found in an account of Clement of Alexandria. He mentions a Zeus Agamemnon worshipped in Sparta and this may imply that Agamemnon was being worshipped as a god, while we also have the indication that kings sometimes assumed the name Zeus to denote either descent from him or a claim to be his representative.

That descent from the gods was claimed by many of our heroes we have already had occasion to notice.<sup>1</sup> Thus Sarpedon is regarded as the son of Zeus, Aeneas of Aphrodite, Achilles of Thetis; Cuchulain is thought to be the son of Lug, Mongan of Manannan Mac Lir. In the same way, in India Yudhiṣṭhira is taken to be the son of Dharma, Bhīma of Vāyu, Arjuna of Indra, Nakula and Sahadeva of the two Aśvins.

Such a divine parentage would certainly confer some sort of divinity on the prince and hold him up as worthy of the worship of his people. But in the Indian epic some princes are thought to be divine in a more immediate sense: they

<sup>1</sup> See Chap. VI, p. 95.

are taken to be incarnations of the god, the god himself in a human form. Thus Kṛṣṇa and Rāma are regarded as incarnations of Viṣṇu in different ages and in the *Mahābhārata* we have numerous instances of the worship of Kṛṣṇa. So iii, 271, 72 ff.: They now call Viṣṇu the unconquerable Kṛṣṇa, with conch, discus and club in his hands. The deity wears the Śrīvatsa, is clad in yellow silken raiment and is the best of those versed in the use of weapons; and such a Kṛṣṇa protects Arjuna. Dhṛtarāṣṭra knows that Kṛṣṇa is Viṣṇu himself (sanātano Vṛṣṇiviraś ca Viṣṇuḥ); and Draupadī in extreme distress (ii, 68, 41 ff.) prays to the absent Kṛṣṇa, "the soul of the universe, the creator of the world," to save her from the insults of her enemies. In the great battle he acts as Arjuna's charioteer; but even there his identity with Viṣṇu is not forgotten (e.g. viii, 62, 1). When Arjuna slays the helpless Karṇa against all laws of knightly warfare, it is pointed out that the counsel of the deity prompted him to act as he did (viii, 91, 18, etc.). Śiśupāla and Jarāsandha might deny the divinity of Kṛṣṇa (ii, 41, 17 etc.); but the Pāṇḍavas and their friends are never tired of emphasizing what Mārkaṇḍeya says in iii, 189, 52 ff.: "The lotus-eyed deity whom I saw in the days of old is Janārdana who has now become your relative . . . Kṛṣṇa is that deity, the ancient supreme lord, the inconceivable Hari, the dhātā and vidhātā, the destroyer of all, the Eternal, the Lord of all creatures."

Yet it must not be forgotten that Kṛṣṇa was an earthly prince with the ordinary human relations. He helped Yudhiṣṭhira to perform the rājasūya—particularly to get rid of Jarāsandha who was his own enemy too, being connected by marriage with his cousin, Kaṁsa, whom he had killed. Kṛṣṇa is Arjuna's cousin as well as his brother-in-law and is his greatest helper in the great battle, being constantly at hand to give him advice on military tactics as on many other things. In this capacity his actions are not always above reproach, as already remarked in the scene of Karṇa's slaying, and Duryodhana frames a whole list of charges against him in ix, 61, 31 ff. He caused Bhīṣma to be slain through the unknighly ruse of placing Śikhaṇḍin before Arjuna; he had the false impression conveyed to Droṇa that Droṇa's son Aśvatthāmā was slain, an impression which

caused Droṇa to lay aside his arms and be slain unarmed by Dhr̥ṣṭadyumna. So too in the slaying of Bhūriśravas, it was Kṛṣṇa who was responsible for the unknighly conduct of the Pāṇḍava warriors and Duryodhana clinches his accusations by saying: "By adopting the most wily unfair means you have caused the death of many princes observant of the duties of their order." Kṛṣṇa can excuse his conduct by only referring to Duryodhana's numerous misdeeds; but of course that is no adequate defence.

As marks of his human nature Hopkins enumerates the following<sup>1</sup>: "His unreasonable rage and broken promise (vi, 59, 88 ff.)<sup>2</sup>; his ignorance (in battle he cannot say where Arjuna is, vii, 19, 21); his worship of Umā from whom he gets his thousands of wives (xiii, 15, 7, etc.); his power 'received from the gods', because he killed Naraka and recovered Aditi's ear-rings (v, 48, 80 ff.); his own admission that he was 'unable at any time to perform a divine act', but he would do what he could do as a man, *puruṣakārataḥ*, that is, he could not interfere with the will of gods; his admission that he would have been unable to kill Karna, if Karna had not thrown away Indra's spear (vii, 180)."

All this is difficult to reconcile with the statements about his divinity in other parts of the epic. The gradual growth of the epic is taken to account for most of these inconsistencies. The original heroic poems probably laid a greater emphasis on his humanity, while later on ideas of his divinity overshadowed it. The exceptional intelligence of the earthly prince may have gradually become the omniscience of the god, though traces of the former have remained in parts of this composite epic. One reason for ascribing divinity to him has been already suggested: the minstrel singing at the court of a descendant of the Pāṇḍavas or one of their allies would desire to whitewash some of their sins, their unknighly conduct on many occasions. Taking Kṛṣṇa as a god, he could point out that whatever the Pāṇḍavas did must be right, as they acted on the suggestions of Kṛṣṇa.

Kṛṣṇa, however, is not the only incarnation of a god

<sup>1</sup> *Epic Mythology*, p. 215.

<sup>2</sup> On seeing the Pāṇḍava soldiers flying before the Kurus, Kṛṣṇa lost control of himself and forgetting his promise about not bearing arms, he jumped down from the chariot whirling his discus, desirous of slaying all the Kuru generals.

mentioned in the epic. In a later passage in xii, 340, Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu) mentions what forms he will take in the various ages. He says: "Assuming the form of a boar I shall slay the proud Hiraṇyagarbha; then taking up the form of a man-lion I shall kill Hiraṇyakaśipu, the great destroyer of sacrifices. As the son of Aditi I shall slay Bali, the foremost of the Dānavas, and in the Tretā age I shall take birth as Rāma in the line of Bhṛgu. Towards the end of Tretā and the beginning of Dvāpara, I shall be born as Rāma, the son of Daśaratha, and at the meeting-point of the Dvāpara and Kali ages I shall again appear in the world in the city of Mathurā for the purpose of killing Kāṁsa." This list of Viṣṇu's avatārs (incarnations) is amplified in the Purāṇas and in the final form mentions twenty-two shapes, while the didactic epic (e.g. xii, 340, 100) as well as the Harivaṁśa do not go beyond ten.

While these lists of various incarnations are fairly late, it seems probable that in the original heroic poems too Kṛṣṇa was regarded as superhuman or at least more than the ordinary warrior-prince. His quarrel with Śiśupāla in the second book seems to be part of an old story, coming down from a time when his spiritual greatness was not unchallenged. At the conclusion of Yudhiṣṭhira's rājasūya sacrifice an *arghya* is presented to Kṛṣṇa as a symbol of worship, and the problem arises if it is meant to indicate his temporal greatness. The sacrifice was to signalize Yudhiṣṭhira's suzerainty over the other princes; the *arghya* is meant to mark the superiority of Kṛṣṇa over the rest. Śiśupāla is furious at this, for he thinks Kṛṣṇa is no king at all, and takes it to be an insult to all the kings assembled to place Kṛṣṇa above them. He suggests that the Pāṇḍavas have become void of judgment through their asceticism (*kṛpānāśca tapasvinah*) and have fallen from the path of virtue and true religion, in thus offering worship to Kṛṣṇa. Bhīṣma defends the offering by saying: "In this assembly of kings I do not see any prince who has not been defeated by the prowess of Kṛṣṇa." This prowess may of course indicate martial skill; but the latter part of the speech (ii, 38, 9 ff.) suggests spiritual prowess more. Śiśupāla in his rejoinder scoffs at Kṛṣṇa's martial skill and adds: "Hearing you constantly assert 'he is the foremost of all



wise men', 'he is the lord of the universe,' Kṛṣṇa has come to believe that they are all true; but certainly they are all false." So the quarrel continues; it is finally ended with Kṛṣṇa's throwing his *cakra* (discus) at Śiśupāla and chopping off his head.

Thus, in the present version at any rate, the quarrel seems to be mainly about the spiritual ascendancy claimed by Kṛṣṇa. Whether it was originally just a question of temporal precedence or not, it is very difficult to say. We can, however, say definitely that the epic nowhere glorifies simply his military valour. It is his intellectual powers that mark him out from the other princes of heroic legend. Thus in the great battle he appears not as a fighter but as a counsellor of the Pāṇḍavas, one to whose advice they were often indebted for their victories. It seems therefore extremely probable that the cult of Kṛṣṇa has come down from the Heroic Age and is not simply a late insertion of priestly bards.

This idea of the incarnation of a deity is practically without any western parallels. There is one Irish story,<sup>1</sup> however, which suggests something similar: Mider, the foster-father of Oengus, son of the Dagda, had two wives, both goddesses. Oengus carried off one of these, Etain; and Mider mourned long for her. Fuamnach, Mider's other wife, resented this and caused Etain to be blown away from her chamber in Oengus' palace. The wind caught her up and carried her to the world of men. There she fell into the cup of a noble lady when the latter was at a banquet. The lady swallowed Etain with her drink and Etain was born as her daughter. When she had grown up she was married to the High-king of Ireland; but Mider, who had not forgotten her, finally succeeded in carrying her off from the king's palace. This story tells us of the incarnation of a divine personage; but it is difficult to take it as a parallel to the Indian idea of the god taking human form to expel certain kinds of evil from the world.

A different kind of parallel is found in the instance quoted in the beginning, as also in Jordanes, who in his account of the Goths mentions the worship of, or at least veneration

<sup>1</sup> See D'Arbois and Jubainville's *Irish Mythological Cycle* (Eng. trans., pp. 176 ff.) following Windisch's *Irische Texte*, pp. 127 ff.

for, distinguished men of the past.<sup>1</sup> With these we may compare what is said in two Eddic poems about Othin: "They call me now Othin, but formerly I was called the Dread One; and before that I was called Thundr; I have been called Watcher and Shaker . . . names which, I think, all come from myself alone" (*Grímnismál*). So again in the *Hávamál*: "Othin wrote this before the world began; he rose up where he came back." It is difficult to say if these passages contemplate incarnations of Othin in the Indian sense; but in this connection we may think of the account of Othin as an earthly king in the *Ynglinga Saga*.

Coming now to the gods whose divinity is not open to question, we may first consider the *devas* known to Vedic literature. Most of these older gods are present in the heroic stories: we come across Sūrya, the sun-god and Vāyu, the wind-god, Agni, the fire-god, and Varuṇa, the ocean-god, Yama, the god of death, and Indra, the lord of the heavens. Four of these, Indra, Varuṇa, Agni and Yama, appear in the Nala-story as the suitors of Damayanti; but on recognizing that her heart is fixed on Nala they do not press their claims and leave the assembly after having conferred various boons on Nala. Yama appears in the Sāvitrī-story to claim the soul of a doomed man, but shows mercy at the entreaty of a devoted wife, and gives the dead man a fresh lease of life. Indra is the chief of the gods in the Kaca-story as also in the Śakuntalā episode; while the main story introduces all these gods in various incidents. Hopkins, in his *Epic Mythology* (pp. 83-152), has given us a catalogue of the *Mahābhārata* passages in which these gods appear and has shown how these passages very often contradict one another. All that they serve to show is that these gods were not yet forgotten in the Heroic Age, though they had now very serious rivals in new gods who had perhaps become prominent in the heroic pantheon. These later "supreme gods" too are fully dealt with by Hopkins in pp. 189-231. Here we may confine ourselves to the examination of the relations between the older or Vedic gods and the later triad,<sup>2</sup> Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva.

<sup>1</sup> We may compare a passage in *Ynglinga Saga*, 41, which may imply the worship of a prince of the Heroic Age in later times.

<sup>2</sup> For triads in other mythologies, see note B at the end.

We must first note that it would not be correct to describe the triad as non-Vedic, for they are all mentioned in various passages even of the *R̥g-Veda*. Thus Macdonell in his *Vedic Mythology* notices the various verses referring to Viṣṇu, passages which describe his munificence and greatness. He crosses the heaven with three strides and makes fast the earth; he and Indra are looked on as masters of the world and his highest place is the realm of the departed spirits. He is Indra's helper, but distinctly subordinate to him.<sup>1</sup> Śiva is the Vedic Rudra and the change in the name is instructive. From being the fierce, malevolent one he has become the good well-wisher; and the change appears to be parallel to the renaming of the Erinyes as the Eumenides.<sup>2</sup> In the *R̥g-Veda* he is fierce and destructive like a terrible beast (ii, 33, 9, 11, etc.). He is malevolent; his ill-will and anger are repeatedly emphasized; but he has healing powers as well and can remove sickness (i, 114, 7; ii, 33, 4-6; ii, 33, 12, and vii, 46, 2). He is, however, *asura*, or rather the great *asura* of heaven (v, 42, 11; ii, 1, 6). Brahmā as Prajāpati is mentioned in several passages of the tenth book of the *R̥g-Veda* and appears in the *Śatapatha* and other Brāhmaṇas.

In the epic, however, these three gods are much more prominent, and it is interesting to compare the parts where they are regarded as supreme with those which introduce Indra and his companions. It is certainly in the didactic and avowedly unheroic parts that the triad is most prominent; the most elaborate passages about them come mainly in the twelfth and thirteenth books of the epic. It is not always the case that Brahmā is regarded as the Creator, Viṣṇu as the Preserver and Śiva or Maheśvara as the Destroyer. Brahmā sometimes appears as Preserver or Destroyer and Viṣṇu as Creator or Destroyer; while various passages would regard Śiva as Creator.<sup>3</sup> But more interesting than these purely theological passages are those incidents where Indra is brought into touch with Viṣṇu or Śiva and shown as inferior to them. Thus in the story of the five Indras (i, 199) Indra is absolutely helpless before Śiva, and all the

<sup>1</sup> RV., viii, 12, 17; iv, 18, 11; viii, 89, 12, etc.

<sup>2</sup> We may compare the instance of Persephone who is not to be mentioned by name. Also the instances of Male-ventum (Bene) and Euxine.

<sup>3</sup> See Hopkins, *E.M.*, pp. 193, 196, etc.

gods look on Brahmā as the master of creation. Indra in difficulties worships Viṣṇu in v, 18. Indra may be discomfited by great heroes, kings or sages; we may think of his encounters with Arjuna or Cyavana, of his being supplanted by Nahuṣa (v, 9, etc.) and of his fear of supersession by Viśvāmitra (i, 71).

But we have to see if we can discover the relative position of the older gods and the later triad in the original heroic poems and understand accurately the reverence for either in the Heroic Age. Here we must point out that in the main thread of essentially heroic episodes such as those of Nala or Śakuntalā, Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva are never introduced. In the main story with all its different layers they do appear on many occasions, and we have to see if their introduction is consistent with the heroic tone of the passages. We must omit the passages where various sages discourse on Śiva or Brahmā to Yudhiṣṭhira, for these cannot in any sense be said to be derived from heroic lays. In the scenes of war and fighting, as also in the story of the childhood and youth of our heroes, gods are introduced. But it is almost always Indra or Agni, Yama or the Aśvins. Indra, Vāyu and the Aśvins are regarded as the parents of the heroic Pāṇḍavas, Yudhiṣṭhira alone being the offspring of the abstract Dharma, virtue. Karna, the most prominent hero on the opposite side, is the son of Sūrya, the sun-god. When the heroes are fighting, they may not be actively supported by the gods, but these latter show their partiality for the one or the other of the combatants as Indra and Sūrya do when Arjuna and Karna are fighting (viii, 90, 18). Indra teaches his son, Arjuna, to use various weapons and in i, 280, tests his prowess by fighting with him. The fight leads to Indra's defeat; but Indra is said to be pleased with it, for it shows him how powerful his son is. Agni, too, comes into intimate touch with Arjuna, particularly in the scenes of the burning of the forest, Khāṇḍava (i, 2, 24 ff.), while Yama and others appear in some battle-scenes.

But Arjuna is associated with Śiva as well. In iii, 89, the former comes out with bow and arrows to fight with Arjuna and in the course of the fight the hero offers worship to Śiva. Yet this very fact of the hero's piety, as opposed to dependence on pure valour, shows that the episode is

removed from the heroic plane. Arjuna receives weapons from Śiva in iii, 167 and 173 ; and it is curious that in both of those passages, especially in the latter, Śiva is " Rudra ". But if Rudra here offers weapons to Arjuna, Indra has him taken to heaven, and it is indicated here also that Arjuna's connection with Indra is more intimate than that with Mahādeva (Śiva-Rudra). These very events are referred to in the form of a prophecy in i, 123, which also essentially emphasizes Arjuna's connection with Indra. Arjuna is not associated directly with Viṣṇu in the heroic scenes : his intimacy with Kṛṣṇa has been taken as his dependence on Viṣṇu. We have already gone into the question and found that the Kṛṣṇa-cult perhaps dates back to the Heroic Age ; but this cannot certainly be interpreted as Arjuna's worship of the triad or even of Viṣṇu as opposed to Indra.

It is thus clear that Indra and his companions were perhaps most prominent in the original heroic lays, though gradually they lost their position to the three deities of a later time. Of these, Brahmā as the impersonal creator of the world did not probably strike the popular imagination in the same way as Viṣṇu or Śiva. The latter had their own worshippers who exalted the one or the other as *the* supreme god. Thus Viṣṇu is supreme in xii, 311 ff. In a fight between him and Śiva in 343, 115 ff. Brahman asks the latter to throw off his weapons and propitiate the former. In xiii, 14, on the other hand, Śiva is the creator of Brahman as well as of Viṣṇu. Such rivalries and supremacies, however, reflecting as they do the religious conditions of a later time, have little of interest for the investigator of the Heroic Age.

In addition to these gods there are others, not mentioned at all in Vedic literature, gods introduced into the latest parts of the epic. Of this type is Skanda who is taken to be the son of Agni <sup>1</sup> in iii, 224, and xiii, 85, while ix, 44, regards him as the offspring of Maheśvara's energy. The son of six mothers, of the wives of six Ṛṣis,<sup>2</sup> he is said to have been taken as a god first by Viśvāmitra and even as an infant caused fear in Indra and the celestials. Later on he was selected as the commander-in-chief of Indra's army and

<sup>1</sup> Agni is, however, identified with Rudra.

<sup>2</sup> This suggests a parallel with the Norse Heimdalr, the son of nine mothers (Gylfaginning, 27 ; Skáldskaparmál, 8 and 16).

crushed the *dānavas*, the enemies of the gods ; and for this achievement he was lauded as the invincible hero to whom all the celestials paid their obeisance. Skanda was married to Devasenā, the goddess of prosperity, who was also called Lakṣmī or Āśā. She is another of the later deities, rather in the nature of an abstraction, especially in the detailed description she gives of herself in xii, 225. Here Indra does not know her nor does any of the other gods ; she has no permanent home but moves on from one place to another, being attracted by penances, prowess and virtue. Another goddess of the later pantheon, Durgā, the deity of destruction, appears in the fourth Book, which has a whole hymn addressed to her (iv, 6). This is, however, a very late addition and the whole section has been rejected as spurious by the latest editors of the *Virāṭa Parva*. Another late section, vi, 23, contains a hymn to her, a hymn that Arjuna chanted on the advice of Kṛṣṇa in order to gain victory in the great battle. Pure abstractions too, like Death in vii, 54, are not very uncommon in the late portions of the epic ; while great seers like Dattātreyā were sometimes deified and regarded as gods in the fullest sense of the term (iii, 115 ; xii, 49 ; xiii, 91). Similar perhaps are the instances of Uśanas and Bṛhaspati ; but Bhṛgu, Vasiṣṭha, Viśvāmitra, Gautama, Bharadvāja, etc., never attained to divinity proper. More definite is the divinity attributed to rivers like Gaṅgā and Sarasvatī or to mountains like Himāvat, Maināka and Krauñca.

These beings, along with a whole world of spirits,<sup>1</sup> were worshipped at the time that the latest parts of the epic were written down ; though the student of the Heroic Age is concerned mainly with the earliest of the devas, the others having been introduced in post-heroic times.<sup>2</sup> But how were these deities worshipped ? It is extremely doubtful whether idols of the gods were worshipped in the Heroic Age, though such idols are mentioned in late parts of the epic. vi, 2, 26, says that among the evil omens preceding the fight was this : that the images of the gods and goddesses sometimes smiled,

<sup>1</sup> See Hopkins' *Epic Mythology* (pp. 152-76) for the Gandharvas, the Kinnaras and Kimpuruṣas, the Apsarās, the Maruts, the Vasus, the Viśvedevas, the Vidyādharas, etc.

<sup>2</sup> The worship of rivers and mountains is probably ancient and dates back to the Heroic Age.

sometimes trembled and sometimes again vomited blood, perspired and fell down. iii, 292 describes Sāvitṛī approaching the family deity which must signify an image of that deity; and iii, 84, 188, speaks of Viśveśvara with Devī at Jeṣṭhila, meaning probably their images at that place. Similar images seem to be referred to in iii, 84, 102; iii, 88, 8, etc., in the description of the various holy places. But such passages are avowedly late and intended to glorify places of pilgrimage in a later age. More significant perhaps is the worship of the image of a spiritual preceptor, of Droṇa's image by Ekalavya who had not been accepted as a student by Droṇa.

But the worship of idols is not mentioned in the detailed descriptions of the religious duties of princes in the main story. Such a description is found in vii, 82; Yudhiṣṭhira having arisen early in the morning, bathed, and decked himself with garlands and sandal-paste, before proceeding to the chamber where the sacrificial fire was kept. He worshipped the fire with purified wood and the recitation of the mantras and then came out and distributed treasure among the Brāhmaṇas. So again in v, 83, Kṛṣṇa rises early and listens to the auspicious hymns recited by Brāhmaṇas, before performing the usual religious rites of the morning which included a bath, the wearing of holy ornaments and worshipping the sun and fire. Arjuna in exile is said to have performed many fire-sacrifices; having kindled fires on the banks of the Ganges, he poured libations of clarified butter into the fire and worshipped it with flowers (i, 216, 8 ff.). In a passage referred to above, Sāvitṛī fasts before offering oblations to the sacrificial fire and worshipping the deity with flowers. A more elaborate sacrifice, the Āśvamedha one of xiv, 88, involves the sacrifice of many animals in addition to the usual oblations, recitation of hymns and distribution of presents, but the rājasūya may not have involved animal-sacrifice.

The chief feature of these rites is the worship of the sacrificial fire which seems to have been kept constantly burning in hermitages<sup>1</sup> as in households, and all religious ceremonies, those of daily worship as also of marriages and funerals, were performed near the fire (cf. i, 70, 19; i, 216, 9-10, 14-15; i, 200, 11, etc.). Temples do not seem to have been

<sup>1</sup> Cf. xv, 37, 15, etc.

specially constructed for the purpose of keeping this fire. The word *devāyatana* or *devatāyatana* is sometimes used; but one does not know how far it refers to specially built temples. Thus in xiii, 10, 19 ff. a *Sūdra* goes into the depth of the forest and makes for himself a hut of twigs and leaves, and an altar for sacrifices and "*devatāyatanāni*", which obviously cannot be any elaborate structures. Another late passage, iii, 190, 67, mentions "*devasthāna* and *devagrha*" and iii, 16, 3, points out that troops, in choosing grounds for pitching a camp, have to avoid cremation-grounds and the temples of gods—*śmaśānāni devatāyatanāni ca*—another indication that the temples were probably little more than mounds of earth dedicated to a deity. Similar too are the *devatāyatanas* of i. 155, 22, where *Bhīma* is taken by *Hidimbā*, or those of i. 140, 64, where as in gardens and places of amusement spies have to be stationed, while the *puṇyānyāyatanāni* of i, 217, 4, and 9, are perhaps only sanctified spots. Some temples referred to in the *Rāmāyaṇa* may be more stable buildings: of this type would be the *āyatana* of a god in *Rām.* ii, 6, 4, or the *devāgāra* of iii, 55, 6, while the passage in *Mbh.* vi, 118, which speaks of the *devatāyatanas* of the Kuru kings, may contemplate something similar.

Much more common than elaborate temples seem to be sacred groves or trees, dedicated to or regarded as the abode of gods. Thus i, 157, 28, mentions the *devāranyas*, the woods of the gods, and iii, 16, 3, the *caityavṛkṣas*, the sacred trees. Holy hermitages have frequently tall trees with very large trunks (i, 70, 21); and these would be the large trees beneficial to men (*caityāṃśca vṛkṣān kalyāṇān*) mentioned among objects to be revered in a late passage (ii, 5, 100). i, 153, 33, speaks of the tree full of leaves and flowers that becomes sacred and is worshipped by all; and Hopkins in his *Epic Mythology* (p. 72) notes various *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* passages mentioning the *caitya*, which is probably a sacred tree.

These references to holy trees and sanctified groves seem to indicate a stage of society when town-life was a comparatively recent development, when men had not yet been able to get rid of the sylvan associations of a primitive life. So far as the dwellings of princes and nobles went,



newer standards of comfort had led to the construction of magnificent structures and gorgeous palaces. But men are generally more conservative in matters of religion, and traditional associations are slow in changing. Places and objects regarded as sacred from the olden days could not lose their sanctity with the migration of the people to newer centres of life; while the priests lived in the courts of princes, they were never tired of emphasizing the holiness of the hermits leading a retired life in the wilderness or the spiritual value of leaving towns and the societies of men for a quiet life in the forest. The hero after leading a life of action in his youth and maturity should retire to the forest and prepare himself for death. As ix, 5, 30 ff. points out: "The death of a Kṣatriya on his bed at home is highly sinful. The man who meets with death in the forest or in battle acquires great glory," or as xii, 298, 38, asserts: "Repairing to the Sarasvatī, the Naimiṣa forest or the Puṣkara lake one should practise renunciation and purify himself with penances, etc." This dictum of the didactic epic is observed by some of the heroes in actual practice. Thus Yayāti in his old age bestowed his kingdom on Puru and proceeded to live in the forest in the company of priests and ascetics (i, 85, 33). So again in i, 119, Pāṇḍu retired to the forest to lead a life of asceticism when he felt he could not enjoy the pleasures of life any longer; and xv, 8 ff. Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his wife left the royal city for the forest after the loss of all their sons, and it was there that they met their death. The hermitages of the famous saints of Kaṇva, Vasiṣṭha and others, were all in the forest, and elaborate descriptions of their surroundings are supplied even in the literary abridgements of some episodes as in that of Śakuntalā in i, 70.

The inference drawn here is supported by a feature of heroic poems which we have had to notice in our discussion of the common characteristics of Heroic Poetry. Similes taken from the life of wild beasts of the forest are common in the *Mahābhārata* as in Homer; and we noticed numerous passages of this kind: *Mbh.* vi, 53, 31; 59, 90; 61, 2; 92, 6; 110, 17; 111, 8; vii, 132, 24; viii, 66, 29; 67, 18; 79, 32; 89, 2, 4, 9, etc.<sup>1</sup> Such similes would naturally occur

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Iliad*, xi, 112 ff.

to a poet fully conversant with the wild life of the forest and would make their appeal too mainly to an audience who had knowledge of such life.

Of course, a part of such knowledge would be acquired from the heroes' love of hunting, of which we have had evidence from passages like *Mbh.* viii, 56, 99, or 80, 26, or from a full description as in i, 69 ff. But this would not fully explain the knowledge of and interest in the life of wild beasts such as we have in the passages referred to. Moreover there is another type of simile we have had to notice, the very common one of forest fires as in vi, 18, 11; 103, 7; 106, 13; 107, 11; viii, 80, 18; vi, 49, 39; 50, 23; ix, 11, 9; 24, 59-60; viii, 24, 58, etc. A very full description of such a fire occurs in i, 224 ff., where the burning of the forest is taken to be an offering to the god Agni who wants this food to satisfy his hunger; and it is probable that dwellers in the forest for whom such a fire would be of the greatest terror would take it in this light and be resigned to their fate. It was in such a fire that the old king Dhṛtarāṣṭra and the mother of the Pāṇḍavas, who were living in the forest, met their death, and they did not regard it as a calamity, for fire is sacred to the ascetic (xv, 37).

These then would tend to confirm the evidence of the sacred trees and groves that city life was a comparatively recent development. Parallels to the caityas are to be found in various places of Europe. Tacitus mentions sacred groves in *Germania*, 9, 39, 40, 43, as also in *Annals* i, 61, and ii, 12. Later, Claudian<sup>1</sup> speaks of "groves grim with ancient religious rites and oaks resembling a barbaric divinity" and the *Translatio S. Alexandri* speaks of the Saxons worshipping trees. These are not good parallels to the *Mahābhārata* instances, for they are the testimonies of strangers to the customs of the Germans and may not reflect the state of things in the Heroic Age but of a period antecedent or subsequent to it. In later times, however, we hear of the holy grove besides the temple at Upsala with its sacred evergreen tree.<sup>2</sup> There may also be a connection between

<sup>1</sup> *De Cons. Stil.*, i, 288.

<sup>2</sup> Professor Ghadwick suggests that the Glaesivöðr sanctuary of Hervarar Saga is probably connected with holy groves—*Glaesir* may be *Glasir*, the Valhöll-tree.

sacred groves and the guardian tree of Swedish homesteads, while place-names with "-lund" denote the former presence of grove sanctuaries; and the *afhus* of late heathen times is probably a development of the holy grove.

We have good evidence for Baltic tree-sanctuaries as well. Aeneas Silvius<sup>1</sup> says that the Lithuanians worshipped woods dedicated to devils. According to Erasmus Stella,<sup>2</sup> the Prussians thought that sacrifices should be offered to the gods dwelling in groves and woods. The intrusion of strangers into sacred groves was thought to cause pollution, and it could be atoned for only by the sacrifice of human victims. Among the Letts there was something like the guardian tree of the homestead; but the most famous tree-sanctuary was that of the Prussians at Romove, an evergreen tree with thick foliage—idols and the perpetual fire (corresponding to the Indian sacred fire) being placed under the tree.

There were also tree-sanctuaries among the Slavs; there was a sacred oak at Stettin, while Wigbert is said to have destroyed a sacred grove in 1008. The Kelts too had their sacred trees and groves that Pliny, Lucan and Tacitus speak of; while Greek and Roman tree-sanctuaries probably existed in pre-classical times and were replaced by temples later on, as in the instance of the temple at Dodona or that of Jupiter Capitolinus at Rome.

It seems possible to work out a connection between the tree-sanctuary and the thunder-god. The Dodona-sanctuary resembles that of Romove in a good many points, among these being the god's manifestation in thunder. Among the Kelts the cult of the thunder-god was important and there was special veneration for sacred groves and trees, particularly for the oak. The two may be connected as in the statement of Maximus Tyrius, who says: "The Kelts worship Zeus; the Keltic image of Zeus is a lofty oak."<sup>3</sup> Among the Romans the oak was associated with the thunder-god as in the crown of "oak-leaves" connected with the Jupiter-cult and in the fact of the famous Jupiter Capitolinus temple standing on the site of a sacred oak. In Sweden, the Upsala sanctuary

<sup>1</sup> *Historia de Europa*, cap. 26.

<sup>2</sup> *De Borussiae Antiquitatibus*; published in *Novus Orbis Terrarum ac Insularum Veteribus Incognitarum*, Basel, 1537, pp. 581 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Maximus Tyrius: *Dissertationes* (or *Dialectics*), viii, 8.

was chiefly connected with Thor whose image occupied the chief position in the temple, while for the Greeks in addition to the Dodona and Lykaïos examples connecting Zeus with the oak, there is the testimony of Aristophanes in the *Birds*: The oak is sacred to Zeus.

It seems possible that among the Indians too the sacred trees were chiefly associated with the thunder-god, Indra. He appears as the protector of the forest in i, 225, 6 ff.; i, 70, 17, describes a sacred spot in the wood as looking like a pole erected in Indra's honour.<sup>1</sup> iii, 126, 36-7, describes the efforts of a religious king, Māṃdhātṛ, who erected many citacaityas, probably on the sites of sacred trees and groves, and obtained "half of Indra's seat" as a reward (Śakrasyārdhāsanam labdhavān). Similarly Gaya in iii, 121, 18, obtained the region of Indra through the erection of many "caityas", a word which we have already found to have associations with the sacred tree. Among the trees of Paradise the most famous was the Pārijāta which was specially the possession of Indra, from whom it was taken away by Kṛṣṇa (vii, 11, 22, etc.); it is possible that the forests of the gods through which Indra's queen journeys in v, 14, 6, were specially dedicated to him.

One reason why Indra was specially associated with sacred trees and groves is probably to be found in his powers as a rain-god. No particular earthly tree is associated with him as is the oak with Zeus. The Áśvattha is the chief tree and corresponds to Yggdrasil, the tree of life, and Kṛṣṇa's description of it in *Mbh.* vi, 39, 1 ff., is instructive; while in 34, 26, he identifies himself with it. Other gods also have their trees in late passages: in xiii, 17, 11, Śiva is identified with the Vakula, sandalwood and chada trees, while in xiii, 85, 44, the Śamī is the birthplace of Agni.

In addition to these sacred trees, there are vegetal divinities like Śakambharī (iii, 84), the Corn-mother, who dwells in the green vegetation of the earth; and Sitā, the heroine of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, who rose in the furrows of the ploughed field, is probably taken to be a similar being in this story of her origin. Next there were supernatural birds and animal divinities who were objects of worship; but with these we have little to do, for their worship is generally

<sup>1</sup> Cf. ix, 17, 52.

mentioned in very late passages and has practically no bearing on the affairs of the Heroic Age.<sup>1</sup>

Next we may discuss the heroic conception of an after-life, a state of existence after death in this world. Duryodhana asserts in ix, 5, 30 ff. that the Kṣatriya's glory is to die on the battlefield; through death in a righteous battle he can pass on to the regions of Indra and obtain the companionship of those who have already reached those regions. So again in vii, 49, 88, Yudhiṣṭhira strives to console the sorrowing companions of the slain Abhimanyu by saying that Abhimanyu had killed in battle ten thousand car-warriors including that supreme hero, the Kosala king, and must consequently have gone to the mansion of Indra. Again in xi, 26, 12, Yudhiṣṭhira says: "Those mighty heroes who have cheerfully faced death in fierce battle have all attained to regions like those of Indra." vii, 74, 31-3, too, describes such a region in the words of Droṇa: "The Kurus, the Pāṇḍavas, the Vṛṣṇis and others . . . all destroyed by the powerful God of Death, will proceed to the regions of the departed . . . even those regions that the heroic Kṣatriyas gain by the performance of their own duties."<sup>2</sup>

This belief in a warrior's paradise is elaborated in a late passage in the eighteenth book, ch. 1-3. There it is explained that princes with more of evil than good in them first pass to the happy regions and having enjoyed the fruits of that little good are doomed to tortures for ever after. The good heroes, on the other hand, first suffer for their trifling sins and next enjoy the companionship of the blessed in Paradise. Thus Yudhiṣṭhira, on his arrival in heaven, saw Duryodhana, enthroned in glory, while Karna, Arjuna and the other heroes were being tortured in a loathsome spot. Very soon, however, the state of things changes and Arjuna, Bhīma, etc., are transported to the blissful regions where they are waited on by gods and Gandharvas and beautiful

<sup>1</sup> The worship of some animal divinities like Hanumat is probably to be traced back to the Heroic Age.

<sup>2</sup> We may compare the following passage of the didactic epic (xii, 97, 31 ff.) : The hero who does not retreat from battle but fights in the van to the best of his powers, careless of life itself, lives in the end with Indra in heaven. Wherever the hero meets with death in the midst of enemies without showing ignoble fear or gloom, he succeeds in acquiring hereafter the regions of the blessed.

apsarās (divine nymphs). Indra appears and points out to Yudhiṣṭhira the respective places of all his brothers and friends, each blazing in his own glory and each having become a part of a deity; there it is their destiny to remain in happiness for ever.

It is interesting to compare this conception of a warrior's paradise with the Norse Valhöll, Othin's chief dwelling, where all persons who fell in battle were supposed to go. Such persons are said to "go to lodge with Othin" or "be Othin's guests", phrases these, exactly parallel to those in the passages just quoted—"to live with Indra" or "to go to the regions of Indra". Thus in the Saga of Ragnarr Lothbrók when Aslaug hears of the death of her son, she says: "he, the youngest of my sons, has, in his terrible valour, come to Othin."<sup>1</sup>

In the Hervarar Saga Hialmarr says: "It seems to me very likely that we shall all be Othin's guests in Valhöll to-night."<sup>1</sup> In Hromundar Saga Kari, mortally wounded, says: "Farewell, I am going to be Othin's guest." The Valkyries, Othin's daughters, were sent by him to choose slain warriors for Valhöll: Thus in Hákonarmál, Göndul and Skögul "were sent to choose a king of Yngvi's race, who should go to join Othin and dwell in Valhöll". They "summon Haakon with a great host to the divine abodes" and then ride off "to the green homes of the gods, to tell Othin that a monarch is coming to enter his presence". Othin sends two of the heroes of olden times, Hermóthr and Bragi, to go and welcome the prince who on his arrival is asked to accept ale from the Aesir. The Einherjar, the dead warriors in Valhöll, spend their days in fighting and their evenings in feasting. They make preparations for the arrival of any new warrior and welcome him as Hermóthr and Bragi welcome Haakon in Hákonarmál or Sigmundr and Sinufjötli welcome Eric in Eiríksmál. The whole picture is taken from the court of a warlike prince; the warriors after death are supposed to lead a life similar to that in this world.

The picture of Indra's mansion is not nearly so definite, and there is no military atmosphere in the one detailed description of heaven—that in xviii, 1-3. As a matter of fact, it is more like the court of a decadent, pleasure-loving

<sup>1</sup> Professor Chadwick's translation.

prince. But we may conjecture that originally the warrior's paradise was as warlike as the courts of the kings where the heroic lays were sung ; and that its atmosphere was changed with the changing tastes of royalty in this world—to suit the Epicureanism of a later age rather than the militarism of the earlier.

## NOTE A

### FUNERAL CEREMONIES IN THE HEROIC AGE

The fullest account of the funeral rites of an Indian "hero" occurs in *Mbh.* i, 127 ff. The bodies of the dead king and queen, wrapped in rich clothes and bedecked with flowers, were carried out of the city to a sacred wood by the Ganges. The funeral-car was decorated with garlands and rich hangings and a white umbrella was held over it. Gems were distributed among the crowd accompanying the procession which was headed by priests in white, pouring libations of ghee (clarified butter) on the sacred fire which was carried in an ornamental vessel. Musical instruments were played throughout the sad journey, while the king's friends and relatives wept loudly. When they had arrived at the place where the bodies were to be burnt, they carefully besmeared them with perfumes and sandal-paste and laid them on the pyre of sandalwood to which they now set fire. After the bodies had been burnt, the king's relatives performed the "water-ceremony" and passed twelve days in mourning. They then celebrated the formal *Śrāddha* and were cleansed from the impurity caused by the death of the king. *Pindas* (offerings to the dead) were offered and an enormous amount of riches distributed among the people, while a feast concluded the whole ceremony.

A more sketchy account is found in xi, 26-7: Yudhisthira made arrangements for the burning of the dead heroes on the battlefield. The pyre was made of sandalwood and the fire was fed by ghee and oil; the dead bodies were anointed with perfumes and clothed in rich silken robes and then placed on the pyre, while many of the weapons and cars of the dead heroes were burnt along with them. The *pitṛmedha* rites in honour of the great dead were performed and *sāmans* and *ṛks* were sung, while the fire burned brightly. After the bodies had been burnt, Yudhisthira and others went to the Ganges, where they threw off their upper garments, belts and ornaments and offered oblations of water to all their dead kinsmen—thus performing the necessary water-rites.

The points to be noticed in these ceremonies are: the anointing of the dead bodies; the sacred fire used to light the pile of costly wood; the sacred music accompanying the funeral procession and the actual burning; the distribution of riches both before and after the burning; the water-rites after the bodies had been burnt; the state of impurity of the relatives for twelve days till the formal *Śrāddha* is performed; the offering of *pindas* on that occasion, and the funeral feast.

The *Iliad* xxiii, gives a full description of the funeral of a Greek hero. First his companions rode round the body, moaning; a funeral feast was then held. Thereupon they built a huge pyre a hundred feet square and placed his body on it. Some sheep, oxen and dogs, as well as twelve captured Trojans, were sacrificed and thrown on the pyre. There was some trouble in lighting the fire, but ultimately it burned merrily and when the body was well consumed the fire was quenched with wine and the white bones of the dead hero were collected and placed in a golden urn. Then "they marked the circle of the barrow, and set



the foundations thereof round the pyre and straightway heaped thereon a heap of earth." After the harrow had been built, Achilles made arrangements for funeral games and offered prizes for the best chariot-racers, boxers, wrestlers, throwers of the javelin, and for the fleet-footed. These contests were held, the prizes awarded and then the assembly dispersed.

In Hektor's funeral there were no games after the body had been buried and the barrow built over the urn containing the bones; but as in the Indian instance, "a noble feast was held at the palace of Priam, Zeus-fostered king." It seems therefore that while the bodies were cremated both in India and in Greece, the Greeks had the additional ceremony of hurrying the bones of the dead and heaping up a barrow of earth or stones; this is a point in which the Greek funerals appear to have resembled the Teutonic.

There are several passages in *Beowulf* referring to the disposal of the dead by cremation. Thus 1108 ff.: "The noblest of Scylding warriors was ready to be cremated. At that pyre one could see blood-stained corselets and swine covered with gold, boars made of hard iron and many princes who had succumbed to deadly blows; for not a few were they who had perished in the slaughter. Then Hildehuth gave orders that her own son should be committed to the flames at Hnaef's pyre . . . The lady mourned and chanted sorrowfully as the warrior ascended [the pile (?)]. To heaven rolled the greatest of funeral fires, roaring in front of the harrow."

A fuller description of the ceremony is to be found in the dying *Beowulf's* injunctions to his companion (2802 ff.) and the actual description of the funeral (8187 ff.). *Beowulf* desired that after the cremation a lofty barrow should be constructed on the edge of a cliff, a mound that could be seen by sailors from afar. After his death, the Geatas prepared for him a funeral pyre hung over with helmets, shields and coats of mail and set fire to it. While the fire was consuming the hero's body, the people mourned his death and his queen sang a song of lamentation. Afterwards they built a wall round the remains of the pyre, and constructed a harrow in which they placed rings and bright jewels. Next, twelve brave warriors rode round the barrow, mourning for the king, giving expression to their feelings of grief and praising his heroism, his deeds of prowess, to the courtiers (*eahtodan eorl-scipe, ond his ellen-weore duguthum demdon*).

The necessity of burning a hero's arms with him is emphasized in the *Ynglinga Saga*, 8, where Othin is said to have ordained that "all dead men should be burnt and brought on to the pyre with their property. Every dead man should come to Valhöll with such property as he had on the pyre." "The ashes were to be cast into the sea or buried in the earth," as in the case of *Beowulf*. With this we may compare Elpenor's request to Odysseus to "burn him with all his arms, all that he possesses"<sup>1</sup> and Achilles' treatment of the slain Eëtion; "yet he despoiled him not, for his soul had shame of that, but he burnt him in his inlaid armour and raised a barrow over him".<sup>2</sup>

Doubts have been expressed as to whether the passage in *Beowulf* accurately describes the funeral customs of the Heroic Age, even though the description is confirmed by archaeological and literary evidence. Thus in the description of Attila's funeral as given by Jordanes following Priscus we notice the following features: "the

<sup>1</sup> *Odyssey*, xi, 60 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Iliad*, vi, 416 ff.

lying in state " while the best horsemen ride round the body, singing the hero's praise ; the funeral feast ; and the burial of the body. It has been pointed out<sup>1</sup> that this description does not tally with that of Beowulf, for no feast is mentioned in the latter and cremation is followed by burial, whereas in Attila's case it was inhumation. Also the riding and singing took place *after* the funeral with Beowulf and *before* with Attila. Next it is contended that we cannot rely on Jordanes' account, for (1) the horsemen of Attila were probably Christians and (2) " the historian who has preserved the account was an orthodox cleric." Finally, the archaeological evidence does not confirm the Beowulf account about the burning of helmets and coats of mail followed by a burial of treasure.<sup>2</sup> From these points it is concluded that the passage in Beowulf is not an accurate description of the state of things in the Heroic Age but the effort of a later Christian poet trying to describe " a funeral of the old heathen type."

It may be pointed out with regard to these observations :

(1) There were always local differences in funeral customs of the same age. Thus the archaeological evidence tends to show that for the period we are considering, the Teutons nearest to the Romans, the Allemanni, the Burgundians, the Goths and the Langobardi practised inhumation almost universally,<sup>3</sup> while in North Germany cremation was the general practice. In the Scandinavian lands too there is considerable variation in customs. Sjaelland had inhumation-graves and no barrows ; Fyn supplies evidences of cremation ; Jutland and Sweden of both inhumation and cremation. The omission of the feast in the Beowulf account is not vital, nor the discrepancy as regards the time of riding round the dead body. In both these points Jordanes' version agrees with the Homeric account rather than with Beowulf ; the *Iliad* (xxiii) mentions the " ample funeral feast " and the mourning led by Achilles : " so thrice round the dead they drove their well-manned steeds, moaning," before the cremation of the body. Thus the difference between Jordanes and Beowulf here also may indicate merely a difference in local customs—a difference in minor points while the main feature of the riding round the dead and the formal lamentation is the same.

(2) But can we rely on Jordanes' account any more than on the one in Beowulf, the former being given by an orthodox cleric and the latter by a supposedly Christian poet ? We cannot here go into the controversy about the Christian authorship of Beowulf, but may note just one or two points : (a) Jordanes' account is based on that of Priscus, who was practically a contemporary of Attila's and whose account must be regarded as fairly trustworthy. (b) A cleric of even a later time describing a *historical* event of a pagan society would try to be much more accurate than when describing a legendary ceremony like the funeral of Beowulf. In the latter case he would be much more likely to introduce the customs of the Christian society of his own age. But the Beowulf account agrees in essence with that of Priscus ; and the probabilities are in favour of its having come down from heathen times and not having been composed by a cleric of the seventh century. (c) In spite of Dr. Chambers' contentions on pp. 331-2 (*Introd. to Beo.*) one feels with Professor Chadwick that an

<sup>1</sup> Chambers' *Beowulf*, p. 124, etc.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 354, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Baldwin Brown's *Arts and Crafts*, pp. 106, 113, etc. Lindenschmidt, pp. 72, 111-17, 122, 124, 127, etc.

author who knew Virgil and Statius would not have disguised this knowledge and probably would have lacked both the inclination and the ability to compose a poem like *Beowulf*.

(3) Whatever the religion of the horsemen of *Priscus'* account might be, the ceremony described was one of the pagan court of Attila and these riders would follow the customs of that court and not of their own religion or tribe, if they were different.

(4) There is archaeological evidence for the burial of weapons and ornaments with the deceased; but mail-coats and helmets are rare. Here one must allow for poetic exaggeration in the description of the funeral of a great king, a king whose death was the greatest national disaster. The poet might want to imply that after the death of such a king, in the absence of such a leader, his warriors would have no prospects of victory in war, and they might signify their helplessness by sacrificing all their best weapons with the passing of their chief, and being prepared for the inevitable—subjugation by a foreign prince.

One may therefore take the *Beowulf* account as a fairly accurate description of what took place in some Teutonic lands at least in the Heroic Age, and compare it with the Homeric and the *Mahābhārata* accounts. The body was cremated in all these instances but *Beowulf* and the *Iliad* describe the construction of barrows after the cremation. There is no Indian parallel to the riding of the horsemen, singing the praises of the dead hero or lamenting his loss. The hero's relatives lament all the time, and observe a period of formal mourning after the cremation; but nothing corresponding to the lamenting horsemen is mentioned. The Indians had a funeral feast like the Greeks; but *Beowulf* does not mention it, though *Jordanes* does. The Greeks had funeral games which are not mentioned either in *Beowulf* or in the *Mahābhārata*, but a curious parallel is described in *Wulfstan's* account of the funeral customs of the *Estas* (Prussians?) (*Alfred's Orosius*).

## NOTE B

### THE TRIAD IN WESTERN MYTHOLOGY

It is curious that the number of supreme gods should be three in various western countries, the three having sometimes different powers and different provinces assigned to them. Thus the Triad in Greece was composed of Aides, Poseidon and Zeus and each of them had a distinct province of his own. But the early Irish Triad of Bress, Balor, and Tethra seem to have originally been one deity who was later on differentiated into three. Another Irish Triad was of the three kings of the Tuatha de Danann, Mac Cuill, Mac Cecht and Mac Grene, elsewhere described as Brian, Iuchar and Uar. Regarded as gods of knowledge, of art and of poetry, they are sometimes merged into one deity, the father of Ecne who stands for all their three spheres. Lucan in his *Pharsalia* (444-6) mentions a celebrated triad of Gaul, Esus, Teutates and Taranus. These gods were sometimes identified with Graeco-Roman divinities and an altar has been found at Chester dedicated to Jupiter Taranus, *I.O.M. Tarano*, identifying the Roman thunder-god with the Gaulish one. In Hertfordshire, at York and Old Carlisle, the inscription, *Marti Toutati* or *Totati*, has been found apparently connecting Mars with Lucan's Teutates<sup>1</sup>; and this connection is also indicated in an inscription found at Seckau in Styria. *Marti Latobio Harmogio Toutati Sinati Mog Enio*. The spirit of evil too may have been represented as a triad in Gaul; this seems to be the suggestion of the three heads of the serpent representing this spirit in a monument at Autun. With these triads we may compare the classical triads, not of supreme deities, but of divine beings with similar powers. Such, for example, are the triple Graces or the triple Furies.

<sup>1</sup> Ward's *Roman Era in Britain*, p. 105.

## CHAPTER XI

### CONCLUSION

WE have examined the society and government of the Indian Heroic Age and found striking resemblances with the Heroic Ages of Western countries. We have also found similarities between the literary works which preserve the record of this Age in the various lands—similarities both in the transmission of tradition and in certain literary traits of the poems which have embodied the tradition. We are, however, prevented from attempting to find out a historical connection between the periods, separated as they are by centuries. It is true the Indian Heroic Age may be taken to be almost contemporaneous with the Greek Heroic Age, for the evidence of tradition seems to bring the end of the latter period towards the close of the eleventh century before Christ<sup>1</sup> and similar evidence points to the middle of the eleventh century for the end of the Indian Heroic Age.<sup>2</sup> But the Teutonic Heroic Age is probably fourteen centuries later and extends, roughly speaking, from about A.D. 850 to A.D. 570, while Welsh heroic poetry deals with people of the sixth and seventh centuries. The Russian heroic poems take us to the eleventh and twelfth centuries and the earlier Serbian Heroic Age points to the end of the fourteenth century, the battle of Kossovo being fought in 1889. Attempts to discover a historical connection between these periods are therefore absolutely futile and we have to explain the similarities in a different way.

Professor Chadwick sums up the conditions requisite for a Heroic Age in the phrase, "Mars and the Muses."<sup>3</sup> Poetry is certainly responsible for the preservation of heroic tradition; but the part played by Mars may not be always obvious. "It is clear from *Beowulf* and the *Odyssey* that a state of actual war is not a necessary condition either for heroic society or even for the formation of a heroic story." Yet there does

<sup>1</sup> See Chadwick's *H.A.*, pp. 174-88.

<sup>2</sup> See Chap. III.    <sup>3</sup> See *H.A.*, pp. 440 ff.

not seem to be "a single story in which the hero, i.e. the leading sympathetic character is not distinguished for personal bravery; and usually the main action of the story turns upon a situation in which opportunity is given for the display of this quality". It appears incredible "that the types of character most prominent in all these forms of heroic poetry could have flourished in times of profound international peace and settled social conditions. . . . Warfare is the state of affairs most commonly involved in heroic stories; . . . and this warfare almost invariably takes the form of hand-to-hand fighting and very frequently that of a series of single combats. The national aspect of war is seldom brought into much prominence."<sup>1</sup>

All this is eminently true of the Indian Heroic Age. The Muses are certainly responsible for the preservation of the heroic stories, and the leading characters of these stories are not such as would come into prominence in times of quiet and peace. Their qualities are best shown in war and it is a state of warfare that is depicted in the central books of the *Mahābhārata*. In the main story, Yudhiṣṭhira is an exception to the general rule of martial figures; but as has been repeatedly pointed out, his position in our epic is anomalous. The great lawgiver and the wise administrator are as much of a rarity in the Indian Heroic Age as in the Heroic Age of other lands. Even when in a story like that of Nala an actual state of warfare is not represented, the hero is marked for his warlike attainments, his skill in the management of horses and his mastery of the bow. We have also noticed<sup>2</sup> that a battle is generally a series of single combats and that the national or tribal aspect of war is never brought out. Emphasis is always laid on individual heroism and individual ambition; and the story is that of the courage and might of Arjuna and Karṇa, of Bhīma and Droṇa—not of the overthrow of one nation by another.

Perhaps it is possible for us to go a little deeper into the causes of the Heroic Age, when we remember some of the prominent features of heroic society. One of these features was a slackening of the ties of kindred, consequent sometimes on a change in social organization from the matri-linear to the patri-linear type. We may go a little further and

<sup>1</sup> *H.A.*, pp. 440-1.

<sup>2</sup> See Chap. V.

investigate the causes of this change, and we may find it to have been due to a clash of differing civilizations, to the replacing of older and more primitive standards by those acquired from contact with a higher and more advanced culture. In discussing the relationship of the Pāṇḍavas to the Kauravas, we concluded on the evidence both of the story of the birth and parentage of the former and of some of their peculiar social customs that they probably belonged to a different tribe. Further, this tribe was perhaps on a lower plane of civilization, practising polyandry and possibly following the matrilinear order of succession. This idea about the inferiority in culture is strengthened if we look at the weak points of the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas respectively. The former violate the laws of warfare, laws which must have been dear to the courtly Kauravas. When a friend of Arjuna is being worsted in single combat, Arjuna comes to his help and slays his enemy against all rules of combat (vii, 142-8). When Karṇa is helpless through the wheels of his chariot having stuck into the ground, Arjuna slays him without any compunction (viii, 91).<sup>1</sup> The Kauravas sin, as Professor Hopkins points out,<sup>2</sup> "after the manner of adroit and polite rascals. They do not break their smaller laws of propriety. They do not play tricks openly and then exult in them. But they secretly seek to burn the Pāṇḍus alive; they skilfully deceive the Pāṇḍu king at dice and pretend that it is fair play . . . They are, in a word, cunning and sly, while the Pāṇḍus are brutal and fierce." The failure of the Pāṇḍavas in gambling is worth special notice, for skill with the dice was a courtly art; and though Yudhiṣṭhira's ill-success may be paralleled with that of Nala, the Pāṇḍavas show in various ways that they are the *nouveaux riches*, "flaunting in the eyes of their guests all the evidences of their wealth and making the lowly but aristocratic Kurus objects of ridicule."<sup>3</sup> On this evidence

<sup>1</sup> Great heroes seem curiously prone to unfairness in fighting—unfairness, that is, from the standpoint of later ages. Cf. Cuchulainn's treacherous murder of Cúrói Mac Daire, king of Munster, in Cúrói's own house. Also Achilles' slaughter of Polydorus, etc., in *Iliad* xx. The brutality of these heroes, too, is always evident. Cf. Achilles' slaughter of Troas in *Il.* xx, and treatment of Hektor's body in *Il.* xxii. See also the conduct of Irish heroes, e.g. of Conall Cernach in the "Lay of the Heads".

<sup>2</sup> *JAOS*, xiii, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> *CHI*, p. 262. Cf. *Mbh.* ii, 47, for such conduct of the Pāṇḍavas.

as also on the grounds discussed already<sup>1</sup> one is inclined to agree with Hopkins that "two types of civilization are embalmed in the poem".<sup>2</sup>

These Pāṇḍava princes then probably belonged to a tribe with an inferior culture, but were brought up in a more civilized court, where they learnt a polish and acquired an education which they could not entirely assimilate. They began to be emancipated from their older ties of kindred and tribal obligation, and tried to make their conduct approximate to the standards of the society in which they found themselves. They did not always succeed in doing so and one result of the imposition of conflicting ideals was that they acted in an irresponsible fashion obeying practically no restraints of society and family. Such conduct on the part of similar characters forms the main theme of the heroic poems of other lands as well; and as Professor Chadwick points out,<sup>3</sup> it may be traced in most of the instances to a contact between a semi-civilized people and one of a higher culture, leading through a period of training of the former to one of domination of the latter by the former.

To take the Teutonic Heroic Age first, we find how greatly the semi-civilized Teutons were influenced by the more cultured Romans. Individual princes were taken as hostages by the Romans and were brought up at Roman centres, the most famous instance being that of Theodric the Ostrogoth.<sup>4</sup> When a prince of this type came to rule over his tribe he would naturally introduce the ideas and ideals he had acquired in foreign lands. Moreover, trade, international relations and the employment of mercenary Teutonic soldiers—this last factor the most important of them all—all these were bringing the Teutons into close touch with the Romans and the civilization of the Empire. We find the result of such intercourse in the deposits of antiquities found in Teutonic lands dating from the first four centuries after Christ, deposits which always contain a large proportion of Roman objects. All this shows us the "training" of a less cultured people by a more civilized one over whom they tried to dominate or from whose power they sought to emancipate themselves in the Heroic Age.

<sup>1</sup> See Chap. VII.

<sup>2</sup> *H.A.*, pp. 448 ff.

<sup>3</sup> *CHI*, p. 286.

<sup>4</sup> Bradley's *The Goths*, pp. 184-5.



The same process is found to a certain extent in the development of the Welsh Heroic Age. Nearly a century perhaps elapsed between the end of Roman Government in Britain and the beginning of this Heroic Age. Also the chief figures in Welsh heroic poetry belong to the less Romanized parts of the country. The Heroic Age was thus a product of communities which had remained at least partially independent but had at the same time been deeply affected by the influence of Roman civilization, a civilization which did not disappear immediately with the collapse of Roman organization in the island. The antecedent conditions of the Welsh Heroic Age were thus similar to those of the Teutonic Heroic Age.

The earlier Serbian Heroic Age furnishes an interesting parallel: The Serb territory had been originally part of the Roman Empire and from about the seventh century to the twelfth the Serbians were in close touch with the Greek Empire and their princes acknowledged an allegiance to the emperor. The influence of Greek civilization was exerted on the Serbs through their princes and perhaps also through some of them employed as mercenary soldiers in the Greek army. On the decay of the Empire towards the close of the twelfth century, the Serbian principalities were united into a powerful state and by the middle of the fourteenth century they came to rule over nearly the whole of the Balkan peninsula. This was their Heroic Age, a product of factors similar to what we have seen with the Teutons and the Welsh.

With the later Serbian Heroic Age, we find the inhabitants exposed to a foreign influence; "but this influence was of a very different character from the others and little calculated to produce emancipation, whether intellectual or otherwise." With the Gauls, however, the influence seems to have been of the same type as noticed with the Teutons and others, the influence of Etruscan and Greek civilization as evidenced particularly in the Etruscan objects found in the Gaulish deposits of antiquities. Definite evidence, linguistic or historical, is lacking, but in the earliest times the Gauls "appear as auxiliaries or mercenaries in the service of the Etruscans."

There is no historical information for the Greek Heroic

Age as well. But it seems certain that the places occupied by the Achaeans in the heroic poems were centres of a high civilization before their advent. Important seats of civilization like Tiryns and Mycenae were probably founded in pre-Achaean times, for we cannot rely very much on the stories of foundation at the hands of Proitos and Perseus, and even if we did rely on them we could not be certain that these princes were Achaeans. The pre-historic civilization was there and the Achaeans came into contact with it probably only at its fall, as Professor Ridgeway suggests.<sup>1</sup> The monuments of this civilization were not constructed under Achaean domination, but probably before the chief centres fell into Achaean hands.

The Greek Heroic Age too therefore appears to be a close parallel to the Teutonic and other Heroic Ages; and we have found that the Indian Heroic Age falls into line with all these. Various factors like their advent from the hilly tracts of the north, their practice of polyandry, their vices and defects, led us to conclude that the Pāṇḍavas belonged to a less civilized tribe brought into touch with the more cultured and decadent Kauravas. Here, as elsewhere, we have the same series of causes operating for the production of the Heroic Age. As Professor Chadwick puts it for the European Heroic Ages<sup>2</sup>: "Firstly, we find a long period of 'education', in which a semi-civilized people has been profoundly affected from without by the influence of a civilized people. Then a time has come when the semi-civilized people has attained to a dominant position and possessed itself, at least to some extent, of its neighbour's property. The phenomena which we have recognized as characteristic of the Heroic Age appear to be the effects produced upon the semi-civilized people by these conditions."<sup>3</sup> "Heroic" society cannot be regarded as primitive, and the people of the Heroic Ages are not to be considered as savages. The characteristics of such Ages "are those neither of infancy nor of maturity"; the typical man of the Heroic Age is to be compared rather with a youth. The characteristics we have discussed—those of emancipation from tribal obligations, of freedom

<sup>1</sup> *The Early Age of Greece*, vol. i, ch. iv, etc.

<sup>2</sup> The Irish Heroic Age, as also that of the Mahomedan Serbians, are exceptions.

<sup>3</sup> *H.A.*, pp. 458-9.

even from ties of kindred—are the characteristics of adolescence. The true analogy is, as Professor Chadwick suggests, “the case of a youth who has outgrown both the ideas and the control of his parents—such a case as may be found among the sons of unsophisticated parents, who through outside influence, at school or elsewhere, have acquired knowledge which places them in a position of superiority to their surroundings.”<sup>1</sup>

This contact then of two differing types of civilization leading to the consequences noted above may be described as one of the most important causes of the Indian Heroic Age; and we are next led on to investigate the possible reasons for the end of the Heroic Age. Here we are on even less secure ground, for not only is there no historical information but the evidence of tradition too is not so helpful as before. Janamejaya, the great-grandson of Arjuna, is the last Pāṇḍava king that the *Mahābhārata* speaks of and Paurāṇic literature knows only the names of his successors. The Heroic Age proper has ended with Parikṣit or rather with Abhimanyu, and Janamejaya's reign is instructive only in so far as it suggests the reasons for this end. The king still follows the life of the old Kṣatriya princes; he is given to hunting and undertakes campaigns of conquest,<sup>2</sup> but the epic account is not interested in these events of his reign. Hundreds of lines go to describe the great sacrifice of his reign and his dealings with the famous priests of the time; but his victorious campaign against Takṣaśilā is referred to only in a single verse or so. A Heroic Age depends both on Mars and the Muses. Mars may still be there; but the Muses are absent. Poets are no longer interested in the deeds of prowess; they like much better to discourse on ritual and theology. It is difficult to believe that the old court-minstrel, the *sūta*, has already disappeared. All that we have to understand is that his efforts have not stood the test of time, while those of his priestly contemporaries have been cherished more and more on account of the spiritual merit to which they could lay claim. The records of the older heroic deeds were materially changed; and less illustrious acts of later ages, deeds which had not gained such a strong foothold on the popular imagination, were slurred over altogether.

<sup>1</sup> H.A., p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> i, 3, 13, 22, etc.

Again, the growth of empires, of one or two centres of authority acknowledged as supreme by smaller principalities, was a feature of the Heroic Age. But such a strong central power did not contemplate the extinction of the smaller kingdoms. These lesser princes owned allegiance to the great king and helped him in times of war, but were ordinarily absolute rulers within their own dominions. The courts of all these princes were centres of heroic poetry, the themes of which were often supplied by their mutual jealousies and strifes. When this order of things is changed and a real confederacy of states formed under a single ruler, many of the centres of court-poetry would disappear and though there would still be minstrels at the courts of the one or two great kings, it would be difficult for them to attract their audience with new tales of heroism. They would have to rely on fresh versions of the great stories of the past and even here the growing importance of the priestly bard would drive them out of the field. The latter would have the enormous advantage of being able to give amusement and edification at the same time, and they would be able to exert the greatest influence on religiously minded princes. Thus with the narrowing down of the centres of court-poetry and the rise of the priestly poet, the end of the Heroic Age is reached.



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